The Shooting Times and Country Magazine—April 26, 1957

WEEKEND ON THE ELBE

by Jeffery Harrison

The SHOOTING TIMES

and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-FIFTH YEAR | FRIDAY, APRIL 26th, 1957 | 1s. 3d. WEEKLY

RETURN AT DAWN

Rearing Pheasants

There are still those who leave oak bark floating in the pheasants' drinking water and who make a witches brew of biscuits and eggs, maggots and spices, with which to feed their pheasants, but others have not the time or the magic touch of the old keeper, and need a cheap, simple system. For them, movable pens—folded on grass and clover and free from any contact with poultry, would seem to be the answer. They are vermin-proof and do not require watching: disease will rarely spread from one pen to another, and there is no shutting-up to do. The busy keeper will therefore be able to put in valuable hours on the partridge ground or preparing the coverts. It is usual to put at least 80% of the birds to covert—whatever the weather.

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CLAY PIGEON SHOOTS

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MAY • 1957

Continued on page 327

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SATURDAY, MAY 4th

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WEST SUSSEX GUN CLUB

Sussex Down-the-Line Championship

I.C.I. SHIELD AND MEDAL

AND NOVICE CUP FOR SUSSEX RESIDENT

(100 birds, Open Competition)

A, B, C AND COLTS CLASSES

AT

GOODWOOD - CHICHESTER - SUSSEX

Commence 1 p.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 11th

Hon. Secretary:
M. DUTTON, MILL ROAD, SIDLESHAM, CHICHESTER. (Tel. Sidlesham 235)

Dressed to Kill

FEW countrymen, especially if they live in southern, midland or eastern counties, will need reminding that in the spring of last year and particularly during March and April, there occurred amongst wild birds severe and mysterious mortality. This was first noticed amongst woodpigeon and the birds were found dead in large numbers throughout the country, many being reported as having been seen to drop dead from trees or while in flight. But pigeon were not the only birds affected, for pheasants also died mysteriously in varying numbers on many estates as also did partridges.

It is not long before the blame for these fatalities were being laid at the door of firms producing seed dressings, and we amongst others were quick to ask how thoroughly certain of these preparations had been tested before use to ensure that they were harmless to wild life. Results after use certainly seemed to show that some were anything but harmless, and amateur deductions and rumour-based findings have been finally borne out by the report published as a result of experiments most ably and successfully conducted by two Ministry of Agriculture experts, in last month's *Veterinary Record*.

After extensive *post mortem* research the possibility of virus and bacterial diseases was eliminated, and once this had been done, the general appearance of most of the carcases and of the internal organs justified a tentative diagnosis of poisoning.

The circumstantial evidence surrounding these cases led to enquiries being made as to the nature of the dressings used on the grain sown in the vicinity of some of these cases for the prevention of insect pests and fungus diseases. It was found that the seed dressings most frequently used were those containing dieldrin, organo-mercurial compounds or a combination of these substances.

The spring of 1956 followed a severe late winter and woodpigeon and game birds had probably suffered some degree of hardship, before the spring sown corn became available to them. Furthermore, it was a very dry spring, particularly in southern and eastern districts, and this might mean, it was thought, that the dressing adhered to the grain for a longer time than it would in a normal season. It was noticeable that the mortality among wild and game birds ceased quite abruptly with the sprouting of the corn.

The loss of pheasant chicks to which reference has been made, was attributed to the feeding of cut wheat from a consignment which on investigation proved to be dressed seed corn. The mortality ceased when this was withdrawn from the diet.

It was felt, therefore, that both circumstantial evidence and the results of laboratory experiments reported prove that dieldrin poisoning may occur in wild and game birds when this substance is used as a seed dressing.

The given total of the Ministry's experiments disclosed that grain dressings containing dieldrin are toxic to pheasants and pigeon. The administration of washings from as little as 1½ oz. of dressed grained proved fatal to adult pigeon. Deaths from dieldrin poisoning occurred between four and ten days after administration. Grain dressings containing organomercurials and gamma-BHC were found to be non-toxic to both pigeon and pheasants. It is suggested, therefore, that the widespread use of seed dressing containing dieldrin was responsible for the severe mortality which occurred in wild and game birds.

THE SHOOTING TIMES AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Official Organ of
THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Clays and Mr. Crang

One of my most interesting and enjoyable mornings last year was spent at the Gun Club, Clayford, where I helped Mr. Robert Churchill to score and time the successful attempt by Mr. J. Harold Crang, of Toronto, to fire 1,000 cartridges at clays in an hour and break 750 birds.

I have been busy sharpening my pencil and oiling my stopwatch in readiness for next Tuesday, when once again I shall be at Crayford, for Mr. Crang is back in this country and intends to improve on his last year's performance. This time his aim will be to break 1,000 clays in an hour.

On last year's form I expect Mr. Crang to achieve his aim and we shall publish full details and pictures as soon as possible after the event.

Lead Deposit

At the annual Gamekeepers' Clay Pigeon Tournament held recently at Gallyon's shooting ground near Cambridge, a spectator voiced a thought which has often occurred to me. In the course of time, what must be the lead content of the ground on which a shooting school or clay bird range is situated ?

His mathematical musings soon outstripped my modest arithmetical powers as he related shot loads to cartridges fired over the years, but it is amusing to reflect on the millions of pellets which must lie buried in such areas.

Having "done classics," I am ignorant of the chemistry of such matters, but I believe that the lead thus spilled oxidises and is therefore useless, which is a pity for it spoils the thought of some gardener in the distant future thinking that he had hit upon a lead mine.

The Deer Group

Mr. Henry Tegner tells me that the Mammal Society of the British Isles held their annual conference this year, from Friday, April 12 until Monday, April 15, in the University of Durham.

Members of the Deer Group, which is associated to the Mammal Society, spent a pleasant day on Sunday April 14, in the counties of Durham and Northumberland, under the able leadership of Mr. G. A. Cowan M.F.H., when they visited Raby Park the residence of Lord Barnard, who had kindly offered the Deer Group the hospitality of his grounds.

The herds of fallow and red deer were inspected. The fallow deer are mostly of the dark variety although there are two pure white does in the herd.

After a picnic lunch at Allensford, Mr. Cowan took the party to some afforested land within sight of the huge mass of The Consett Iron Works. Here they saw roe does and a good buck, already clean of his velvet. The day ended with a visit to Whalton, in Northumberland, where the Deer Group was entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tegner. Mr. Tegner's collection of roe heads, and other cerviana, were available for the inspection of his guests.

For once the weather was exceedingly kind after a week of bitter cold and everybody enjoyed their day.

Cover Picture

Our cover picture this week is a photograph of one of Hugh Monahan's paintings showing baldpates (wigeon) returning at dawn from the alfalfa fields to the Salton Sea in the Imperial Valley, Southern California.

The most lucrative farm crops in the Imperial Valley are lettuce, alfalfa and canteloupes. Just when the alfalfa and lettuce are fetching the highest prices, enormous flocks of wigeon fly in from Mexico to join the large numbers that already spend the winter in this area and the damage that the birds inflict on the alfalfa may be judged from one 160 acre field on which after six days, the wigeon had left only 40 acres of the crop.

The authorities have found no suitable way of controlling these depredations. Although the refuges are full of alfalfa grown specially for the wigeons' benefit, the duck prefer to fly farther afield and ravage the farmers' crops.

As a result, generally in February and March, the Federal authorities "open up" the shooting of wigeon, by day and by night on the alfalfa fields, with no limits, and as many as 100 duck have been shot by a single gun in under four hours.

To a certain extent, other duck, such as pintail, which are more manageable, join in these feasts, and have in some cases eaten State Refuges out of house and home, but so far no depredation order has been made against any other wildfowl except the wigeon.

Handicapping by Distance

In connection with our leading article of last week, I understand that rules have now been laid down by the Executive Committee of the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association for the guidance of clubs wishing to hold handicap-by-distance events. Copies are obtainable from the Hon. Secretary of the C.P.S.A. at 276 Whitchurch Lane, Edgware, Middlesex.

AUCEPS.

A wigeon's-eye-view of a punt creeping along on a making tide.

PUNT-GUNNING

by Tower-Bird

It is as old as punt-gunning, this not-so-civil war between punter and shore shooter. It is, moreover, a strange war, for many shoulder gunners go afloat at times for a big shot, while many punters fill in their spare time shore shooting. There are, therefore, two distinct factors at loggerheads, rather than two distinct types of sportsmen.

I WROTE the above words in a book of mine shortly after a heavyweight punter had called me a "tit-shooter" because I had collected for myself a nice little bundle of redshank, and insisted that I considered shooting redshank on the saltings could be even better sport than shooting snipe on inland marshes, and that, early on in the season at all events, shank are almost as good to eat as are snipe.

Moreover, I suggested to him that, on the next occasion when he was enjoying what looked like being a successful "stalk" in his punt, and a yelper (redshank) rose and went shrieking out across the muds or water, alarming the duck he had been after, to give my habit of bagging a shank or two for myself serious thought!

His return to this mild attack was immediate, for one or two of his more happier moments, just prior to kicking the floor-boards or yanking the lanyard, had been harshly and utterly ruined by some shore gunner popping off his musket—possibly at a redshank!

I again retaliated by telling of long, difficult stalks, or lengthy waits in the bitter cold about to be rewarded, when the boom of a puntgun sent every duck rocketing off the surface of the water, or the edge of the mud.

The King of Fowlers?

Well, we argued that morning for at least an hour, sinking our pints quickly, or slowly according to the tempo of the battle, but though he sometimes went a bit redder in the face and I banged the counter once or twice with my fist, there was no real enmity between us. Neither was hot under the collar, and neither held any resentment towards the other. In fact, we enjoyed the argument, though agreeing to disagree on certain minor points. That is how it should be and usually is, though there are exceptions.

The days of really big guns and of really big shots successfully made are over; even so, the punter likes to consider himself the king of fowlers. His sport, indeed, is a grand one, supposedly despised only by those who know nothing about it, but who honesty and wrongly regard it as a menace to wild life on the tideway; a menace undivorced from big bags and many wounded fowl.

A Wildfowl Conservationist

The truth, however, is that the punter today may go for a whole season or many seasons without making a big shot, and, if one bitter winter's morning, after a stalk which only the most hardy man could undertake, he brings home a tidy bag of wigeon, mallard, or teal, no one in his right senses can say that he has not fully deserved this modicum of success. He knows what he knows, this punter, and can smile at some of the mass slaughter recorded in days gone by. He, himself, is as much a wildfowl conservationist as the next man, and his sport is more arduous than any. As I wrote of him at the time: "He must have a good knowledge of weather, times and tides, and he sometimes takes risks for which he deserves commendation . . . He crosses the wind-swept estuary in his frail craft, between lights which wink and blink from the shore; or heads out to sea where the silver reflection of the moon lies like a lane from harbour to horizon."

So far, so good, but it must be admitted that at times this age-old "war" between punter and shore gunner may develop locally into something of a fracas, if nothing worse. Yet, even when this regrettable rift occurs it should not be regarded as a serious quarrel between punter and shore shooter, but merely akin to those often seemingly-serious differences of opinion between local shore gunners shooting different sides of a river or marsh. Maybe I have been more fortunate in my choice of fowling grounds than some people I know, but I must say that, on those estuaries and rivers I have shot, I have always been able to bless the presence of a punt. Sometimes a long wait, or a difficult stalk, has been spoiled for the moment by the boom of a punt-gun, but, more often than not, the punt and its boom (or even the punt and no boom!) has shifted those paddlings of mallard, or those rafts of wigeon from the edge, or centre of the tide, and shore shooters have had their chance, which they would not otherwise have had, of killing duck now within good range.

There is no doubt that a punt-gunner *can* spoil the sport of local shore shooters, either by using a water so small that the birds take themselves off altogether; or by shooting too often on a limited area of water. The shore shooters in the area will then become peeved, to put it mildly, and the title punt-gunner instantly becomes MUD. But there is no reason to suppose (except, perhaps, under exceptional, or unusual conditions) that a punt should do any harm on a fairly small water, always providing that the punter knows his job, is friendly with the shore shooters, and shows every consideration for their sport as well as for his own. He may even, as I have said, stir up obstinate rafts of duck lying well out from the shore, and so give shore shooters the chance of a shot or two. Nevertheless, he must not be enticed by the number of fowl present to overdo his sport, but always give consideration for the greater number of fowlers, which are, of course, those on shore, waiting behind sea-wall, or hidden in mud-gutters.

It can well be, during a suitable time, when there is a good influx of birds on the water, that he may make one of those rare big shots, or one or two smaller and satisfying ones. And perhaps it is only human nature that such a shot, or shots, is bound to cause talk and criticism among the shore gunners. One good shot may sound a lot of birds, and the shoulder gunner may mentally deduct this amount from a raft of wigeon he has seen, or compare it with his own limited bag. I say that this is all wrong, always providing the punter is not overdoing his sport and badly disturbing the fowl.

I am very glad that the official policy of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland towards this rather vexed question is one of assurance that the Association looks after the interests of the punt-gunner equally with those of the shore shooter, and that they will leave to any local club, or to local gunners the business of "fighting out," or rather "ironing out," any differences which may arise between punter and shore shooter. That is as it should be, for the locals understand local conditions.

Another Sidelight

One point I have not seen in print concerning punt-gunners may be illustrated in another conversation I had two or three seasons ago. A bird-watcher, inclined to be antagonistic to sport, and obviously so towards that of punt-gunning, complained to me that, after a punter, during a few days' holiday, had been shooting over a vast area of water, a great many wounded duck and some wounded and dead waders had been washed up on shores round the area. This seemed to me to be most unlikely, since the punter would never have rested until he had made as sure as can be of gathering any winged, or wounded bird.

I discovered the answer quite by chance—the alleged victims of the punt-gunner were, in fact, victims of a far more invidious cause, oil pollution of the high seas. Many birds picked up did not, at first sight, appear to be oiled, but closer examination showed them to be in this unhappy condition. Others were obviously coated with it. Either the bird-watcher was unacquainted with birds which had suffered in this way, or found only those which did not on first sight appear to be oiled. Perhaps, even, he saw only the bodies washing against the shore, or a few hapless live birds on the beach.

Anyway, I met the punt-gunner some time later and asked him about his shooting. He told me what he had killed, collected, and was both shocked and slightly amused over the bird-watcher's report. It was quite obvious that oil pollution and not shot had been responsible for the dead and the dying duck and waders. I had guessed this in any case after the bird-watcher had mentioned dead gulls.

Duck Days In Egypt

(Concluded)

by J. Wentworth Day

TWO other cars drew up behind us, brakes hissing. One driver, a bristly-moustached litlle subaltern, roared out; "Get out of the way—*imshi!* Charge the barrier!" Maratos expostulated, explained.

The whole point of the barrier, the crowd and the hold-up was apparently that the lessee of one of the shoots farther down the road had not paid his rent. So two *ghaffirs* (gamekeepers)—the guns were their badges of authority—had been detailed to sling an iron bar across the road and hold up all cars until the rent was paid. Rough and ready if you like, but efficacious. Maratos sent a runner for the local *omdeh* or village headman.

Five minutes of delay and he arrived, galloping up the road on a white country-bred Arab, followed by a motley cavalcade on donkeys, *galabiahs* blowing in the wind, legs going like drumsticks. The matter was soon settled. It was explained that we neither owed the rent nor were destined for the shoot where it was owing. On we went.

The car turned down a side road to the right, bumping unevenly. On the right side of the road a broad dyke gleamed. It was exactly the sort of dyke that you would have found in the Fens. On the left stretched a vast dry bog, the beds of waterless pools brown and dusty, clumps of reeds standing stiffly. Ahead, the reeds rose into denser forests. And beyond them, shimmering yellowly on the skyline, were the waves of the desert. It was wild, open, desolate.

My mind went back in a sudden nostalgia to the wide and reedy levels of Horsey in Norfolk where the dykes and the reed-beds, the gleaming broad and the willows march in a flat panorama to the tawny sandhills where the sea mutters. Only a month or two before, back in England, the sea, groaning hoasely at that thin sand barrier, had suddenly trampled it under, broken in with a roar in the night and drowned the green and reedy levels—those levels where Lubbock once saw his seven sea-eagles soaring.

And here, before one's eyes, were eagles soaring. A marsh-harrier beat low over the road ahead of us. A hen-harrier was quartering the marsh. Take away the difference of palm trees and Arabs, blot out the string of camels which made a fantastic frieze upon the desert skyline, and, for all practical purposes, we might have been on Horsey levels a hundred years ago, where the sea-eagles soared and the duck were thunderous in their thousands.

Members of the Syndicate

At a turn in the road we came to a little knot of men standing by a shooting hut. They were members of the syndicate which had the neighbouring shoot. There was Driskell, that charming and humorous American dentist who pulled your teeth and made you like it. There was Dr. Hurst, who knows more about irrigation than most people in Egypt. There was Hindmarsh, who is an encyclopaedia of Egypt, its birds and shooting. There was Saleh Enan Pasha, who, they say, is the best shot in Egypt. And there was Wise Bey, one-time Commandant of the Provincial Police, the man whom the Arabs in the villages adore. We said "Good mornings" and drove on.

We motored a mile down the road, great lagoons breaking away on the right in flat silver. Huge packs of duck were already in the sky. They beat backwards and forwards over the water in V-shaped wedges, in long straggling teams, in compact little parties. It reminded me suddenly of those steel engravings of incredible quantities of fowl over which I pored enviously in Folkard's "Wildfowler" in the enchanted days of boyhood. It seemed then that there never were, and never would be, such millions and tredillions of fowl to gladden one's eye. Yet here they were—thousands, if not the authentic tredillions.

A knot of Arabs, a posse rather, or as the more enlightened type of London daily would have put it, "a small army" of Arabs and mixed types of natives cluttered the road in front of us. They waved and yelled. A barefooted, brown-legged, hawk-faced fellow, his eyes alight with excitement, leapt on to the running board. Maratos and he machine-gunned each other in Arabic. The car turned off the road on to a flat sandy stretch. We got out. The army descended among us, grabbed guns, cartridges, decoy duck, game bags, everything portable or snatchable. My host, Major Bather of the Frontiers Administration, leapt at them, buffering, cursing in Arabic. They dropped back, grinning.

The Sportswoman

More cars arrived. From one of them decended, to my mute astonishment, a tall and remarkably good-looking woman. She carried a gun and a flashing smile. Here was Mrs. Bowen, the wife of Major C. J. L. Bowen, notable not only in that she is a very workmanlike shot, but that she had made the most of life in Egypt by catching the biggest barracuda I have ever seen. That was at Akaba on the Red Sea.

We compare notes, discoursed learnedly on how to set out wooden decoys—and, believe me, they make the most of them in Egypt—and then moved off, pleasantly chatting, attended by a gabbling horde. There was a broad irrigation ditch, and there you handed your gun to an attendant, climbed precariously upon the wobbling back of semi-submerged Arab, and was transported across a miniature Jordan in the imminent deadly peril of a sudden duckling in muddy water the colour of black coffee.

On the opposite bank, across a hundred yards of sand, the big lake glittered sharply, a sweet fresh wind off the desert raising serried ripples. Reed-beds and swampy tracts of rough tussocky grass bordered this lake. It was, I should say, three-quarters of a mile long and half a mile across. The desert came down to the opposite shore. Round clumps of reeds stood up here and there innocently. These were the hidden butts.

Flat bottomed boats were run out into the shallow water, a gun or two guns in each. Arab boys acted as outboard motors. They pushed, pulled and grinned. Nowhere was the water more than thigh-deep.

I was decanted at a stout rush-built hide, on a tiny island, five or six feet square. You could just stand upright and peer through the ragged stems at the top, with no more than your hat showing. They were admirably built, with plenty of room to turn and swing, peep-holes through which to watch the water, a shelf for cartridges, a seat to sit on. A Sudanese boy squatted at my feet, the whites of his eyes rolling. He was all anticipation and Nubion excitement. Two others flattened themselves against the reed-walls outside.

These were the retrievers. You do not use dogs. Egypt is hard on good gundogs. Like any other Eastern country it is better to trust a semi-naked boy with an eye like a hawk than a dog fresh from England, ready and willing to catch every bug, worm and disease that walks. I waved them away, bidding them by signs to hide themselves a gunshot or more from the butt in the tussocks of the flat marsh behind. They departed, splashing.

Shooting Over Decoys

I loaded my gun, broke open boxes of cartridges, turned back the flap of the cartridge bag, waited. In front of the hide, sixteen or twenty decoys rode at anchor. They were remarkably lifelike. They used good decoys in Egypt, all made by native workmen, carved out of wood, cunningly. You could trust an Arab to make a wooden duck *look* like a duck. And they were cheap—so cheap that when I came back to England I got my friend, Mr. Maratos, to pack up a crate of them and send them on ahead by steamer and rail. At home in Cambridgeshire on the Fen pools, not so very different from Egyptian pools, they have acted like charms, bringing duck whistling down from the sky, whilst other guns gazed hopefully, but hopelessly for birds that did not come.

There was quite a lot of fun with those wooden decoys at Victoria Station. I had to go and explain the mysterious wooden box which had weathered, without question, the Custom's scrutineers of Alexandria, Genoa, the French frontier, Boulogne and Dover. But Victoria was adamant, inquisitively polite.

"Might I ask, sir, what's in that there box?" inquired an official.

"You may—wooden duck," I answered, blandly.

"Wooden duck!" Polite eyebrows, official disbelief, and implied refusal that the official leg should be lengthened.

"Yes, wooden duck."

"Reely! And what, might I ask, do you use wooden duck for?"

"For shooting other duck—wild ones."

"But you can't shoot a wild duck with a wooden one."

There was a note of finality. The farce had gone far enough. Truth must out.

"You don't," I agreed. "But you put them

Shooting from the butt on the lakeside.

in the water, hide in a beer-barrel, quack like a duck, with a patent quacker." I fished in my pocket, produced it and quacked loudly. An old lady's dog barked. The old lady turned puce.

"And then the wild duck think that you're a duck quacking and that these wooden duck are other duck, so down they come to make friends. And you up with your gun and shoot them.

"Yore telling me ! "

"I am—and it's true."

"Well, sir," ponderously, "might I ask you if you have any objection to the corner of that packing case being opened ? "

"Not at all."

The packing case lid was ripped up, nails screeching. I delved, produced a wooden duck, set him on the counter, where he regarded the official with a bland pomposity of a waterfowl at peace with its belly and the world. The official scratched his head.

"There are twenty-three more," I ventured tenderly. "Would you like to see them ? "

"No sir," firmly. You win ! "

"You didn't believe me, did you."

"That I didn't ! You had me proper ! "

"Well now, I expanded. "Supposing you sawed each one of those duck in half and found that it contained a pound or more of heroin, what you say ? I have just come from Egypt—they spend half their time there trying to catch drug traffickers. Don't you think that would be easy ? "

"It would be—but I ain't."

That ended our little comedy. I am still happy to remember his parting shot: "Well, you're the queerest cargo and the nicest gent I've seen for a long time—but them duck 'ad me."

International Shoot

We are a long way from that reed butt in a bay of the lake on the International Shoot at Tel-el-Kebir. They called it the International Shoot because, if I recollect rightly, the members of the syndicate included two Egyptians, a Greek, a Frenchman, an Englishman, a Syrian, a brace of Turks and a Smyrnese. The sun beat down. It was getting hotter. I took off my jacket, rolled up my sleeves. Duck were pouring in from all directions, big parties, little parties, with single birds, mostly pintail and teal, shooting in like torpedoes. They lit in the water to right and left, cutting furrows like speed-boats. I waited for the signal shot. Suddenly it came, a sharp crack from the far end of the lake.

Instantly that very blue skyline against the desert horizon was stippled by the wings of a great floating cloud of duck. They swung back and forth like a blown plume of smoke.

Other shots rang out. Duck were on the wing sibilantly, instant meteors. A party of pintail swung overhead in a swift rush. I snapped, cut one down, missed another. Nine shoveler jumped instantly twenty yards away. The second gun cut down a right and left Then we were busy. It was load and fire, reload and shoot again. Not even an English pheasant covert, the first time through, with the wind just right and the bouquets nicely planned, could have provided prettier shooting than that first sharp ten minutes.

After that they came in more slowly. The big lots cleared off to other lakes. From far and near came the pop-popping of staccato shots. The duck came in smaller parties now. There were lots of single birds. Away across the lake a quarter of a mile from me I watched a shoveler high over Maratos's butt. Through the glasses I saw him put his duck-call in his mouth, heard his quack loudly. The note was inviting, insistent. The shoveler answered to it, planed down to the decoys. A shot rang out—missed—another shot. Another miss. The shoveler banked steeply, shot away across the lake, climbing higher.

Then the most extraordinary thing happened. The duck-call quacked louder, more insistently. Maratos went through the whole gamut of duck seduction. And, in spite of having had two and a half ounces of lead discharged at it that shoveler came back, dropped again to the decoys and fell to his first barrel.

What particularly interested me at this shoot was to see the very sensible and expert use made of both wooden decoys and duck calls. It is a pity that we do not make more use of both of these commonsense adjuncts in this country.

Shooting went on for about an hour longer. I got a mixed bag of pintail, shoveler, and teal, Mallard were relatively scarce. In fact, you do not see a great many of them in Egypt at all. I remember once shooting with the son of Dr. Faud Sultan Bey, the Director-General of the Banque Misr, at his lake at Ayat. Between us we got 256 head, of which 181 were

Mr. Emmanuel Maratos, the well-known Cairo gunmaker and sportsman, on the lake-side at Tel-el-Kebir.

duck, the rest being coots, plover and snipe. That was the result of about two and a half hours' early morning flight, and it is literally true to say that my gun barrels got so hot at one period that I had to wrap my handkerchief round my left hand.

But what amused me was that at the end of the shoot my host's son, an excellent shot and a most charming person, produced for me with an air of great triumph, a bird which he assured me was very rare and would, he trusted, be a welcome addition to my ornithological collection. It was the first one he had shot that season, and indeed, the only one he had seen for some years. Then the bird was produced. It was a mallard !

A Bad Day

To return to Tel-el-Kebir. At the end of the morning we counted the bag, which totalled 251 duck and 16 snipe. This was considered a bad day, and I was told that, on a normally good day, the bag for seven or eight guns who were out would have been double. At Tel-el-Kebir, as at a good many other places, it was quite possible for a single gun to kill anything from 60 to 100 duck in a morning, and the hundred has been exceeded a good many times. I walked a snipe marsh after the shooting was over and picked up eight snipe in about twenty minutes.

Apart from such big, organised shoots as those at Tel-el-Kebir and elsewhere, there were plenty of places in those peaceable days where the ordinary man with a good local guide could get all the shooting he wanted. Usually the local fellaheen took it as a matter of course if you shot over their fields. The two cardinal rules to bear in mind were: Never to shoot low for fear of hitting a labourer and never, under any circumstances, to shoot a pigeon. Pigeon guano is the most prized fertiliser in Egypt and the village pigeon-cotes are sacred. The man who shoots a pigeon will bring the whole village down upon him in wrath, and if he is tactless he may be very severely beaten up. That is what happened to two young English subalterns not far from Luxor, some years ago.

One of my pleasantest recollections is of a day spent shooting a chain of swamps and reedy pools at the back of the great sugar plantrations at Kom Ombo. I forget what our total bag was, but we got a very useful mixture of pretty nearly everything, and wound up in the afternoon by shooting three pools right out in the desert.

Each was about a mile distant from the other, and we stirred the duck up from one pool to the other by sending Arabs racing from pool to pool on camels—the oddest form of beater imaginable. The recollection of that day lingers with the taste of goat's milk cheese, hard-boiled eggs and crusty bread eaten on a hump of sand overlooking a pool with a bottle of Mariut wine, the native Gianaclis wine of Egypt.

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Lt.-Commdr. J. W. Anderton, R.N.V.R., 19 Castle Street, Liverpool, 2.

Since the last publication of notes in this journal, the usual fortnightly meetings of the Darlington and District Wildfowling and Gun Club have taken place under the chairmanship of Mr. E. S. J. Standen, with one exception when he was inadvertently absent and the chair was taken by the secretary, Mr. Peter Wright.

It was voted that the sum of £5 5s. 0d. be donated by the Club to the Silloth Wildfowlers' Disaster Fund. Several raffles have also been held to assist the Club's funds, and also a small contribution from the proceeds of the raffle of the Menu Card, duly signed by several well-known W.A.G.B.I. personalities, which Mr. Standen brought back from the annual general meeting, has been despatched to the honorary treasurer of W.A.G.B.I.

The Club has now gone ahead with its training programme, and a special committee under the heading of The Hunter Training Committee has been formed to deliver lectures and demonstrations to Club members and public bodies. Already one lecture and demonstration has been given at the Police Training School of the Durham County Constabulary at Harperley Hall. This demonstration was a great success and was given in two parts. First, a lecture and demonstration on Safe and Unsafe Gun Handling was given by Mr. Wright, assisted by Messrs. Johnson and Haithwaite. Secondly, a talk on The Law as The Sportsman Sees It was given by Mr. Leith. Afterwards, a quiz was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Standen when questions were invited by the audience. This proved most popular, and the panel dealt ably and confidently with the many varied points raised. The team was later royally entertained to supper by the Police, and the evening was voted a great success.

It is hoped to arrange further lectures and demonstrations to various other bodies such as Education Committees at later dates. It is felt that these lectures will bring very pointedly before the public the great necessity for correct and careful handling of firearms. At every lecture, the aims of the wildfowling clubs are heavily stressed, and listeners are implored to ask their acquaintances who intend to take up shooting to join these Clubs where instruction and supervision are so readily available.

A film show consisting of four films—"The

(Continued on page 331, col. 3)

Typical woodcock cover in the Lake District.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

OFTEN on a balmy evening at this time of the year I stop in a woodland glade to listen to the unmusical but fascinating notes of woodcock as they fly backwards and forwards in their nuptial flight, *Krock, krock, twisick,* they say, or at least that is what they seem to say to me, although words cannot represent the call accurately. While it is being uttered the birds pay no attention to a human being. They know somehow (like the craftiest of cock pheasants) that a close season for shooting game is in force, and they enjoy themselves without restraint until the light fades over the fells. This sound completes a perfect spring evening for me.

Incidentally, woodcock have not always been safe during their "roding" flight. Some time ago I read in the "Hundred Years Ago" column of a local Scottish paper that the headkeeper of a well-known estate had shot six woodcock in April. Obviously this reprehensible bag had been made in the evening; but as far as I am aware, no law was broken. Nevertheless, woodcock were scarce in that part of Scotland at nesting time a hundred years ago; so one would have thought that this keeper would have been rather ashamed to let his feat get into a newspaper, even if his conscience did not reproach him for being such a Philistine.

Nowadays since the passing of the Protection of Birds Act, 1954, the penalty for killing six woodcock during the close season might be £30; for each dead bird constitutes a separate offence. Furthermore, any constable may arrest a person suspected of committing an offence against this Act, if he fails to give his name and address to the officer's satisfaction. It is probable also that a gun might be seized, although it would not be confiscated by a Court order.

The Old Vexed Question

This forenoon I rose a pair of woodcock among the thin, scrubby cover of a sunny bank; and as I watched them fly together across the corner of the parkland, then over the tops of the oak trees at the other side, it occurred to me that this species has caused more acrimonious arguments than any other among ornithologists amateur and professional in modern times. One school believes implicitly that woodcock carry their young, while another believes that this is all balderdash. So far, I have never been able to witness this alleged habit, although I have been among woodcock for the greater part of my life. But I try (not very successfully!) to keep an open mind on this subject, because I realise that even the most patient observer cannot hope to verify everything connected with natural history at first-hand.

Unconvincing Evidence

At the same time I must confess that much of the "proof" offered to me either directly or through the correspondence columns of journals has not been convincing. Some of those informants have had their minds so conditioned by previous stories that they have jumped to conclusions too quickly when they have seen a woodcock perform the usual heavy-flight act as she rises from her young. They have not followed up the departing bird with sufficient thoroughness to find out whether she really had been carrying a chick or not, despite the fact that a woodcock which behaves in this fashion generally settles within 50 yards of the taking-off point, and utters distressful cries. As a rule I follow woodcock which fly heavily; but I have never discovered a chick where they have alighted. Invariably they fly off with their usual facility when they are flushed a second time, and are certainly carrying nothing then.

If, however, a dog remote from a human being arrives at a woodcock with young, the bird's behaviour is different. She does not attempt in these circumstances to go through the motions of carrying a chick. She flops on her breast with wings outstretched, and shuffles forward on the ground making pitiful sounds. But although she seems to be helpless, the dog will be sharp indeed if it manages to catch the bird. And when she is convinced that her chicks are not in immediate danger, she will take to wing. Anyone who has witnessed those tricks realises that the mother is aware of the dog's keen scenting powers, and therefore adopts a more insistent luring system than she practices on a human.

From a consideration of these tactics we learn that the woodcock, which is supposed to carry its young, is also the one bird in Britain which *pretends* to carry its young in flight. Undoubtedly this is a complication. If woodcock had never pretended to carry their young, any stories of genuine carrying might have been accepted without question. But the sceptics may reasonably wonder whether or not there would have been any stories to accept in that case. They believe that this pretence is the sole origin of the legend.

However, in addition to those people who evidently mistake pretence for reality, there are others who maintain that woodcock carry their young to the feeding grounds as a matter of daily routine. One man known to me wrote a letter to a sporting paper before the war to say that a woodcock landed near him with a chick while he was standing beside a stream at dusk. And some observers have said that woodcock have flown towards them, then grabbed up a chick before their eyes. This is, of course, rather different. In cases of this kind a normal person with ordinary eyesight could not be expected to make a mistake.

Ornithological Squabbles

The celebrated ornithologist, T. A. Coward, apparently never saw a woodcock carry her young, but just as apparently he believed that they could do so. Here is an extract from one of his books: "It is not certain that the old bird carries them (the chicks) to and from the wet feeding ground, but she will carry them away if the nesting site has been discovered. As to how this is accomplished is one of the ever-fruitful themes for ornithological squabbles; it does not seem to occur to most people that birds of one species or even an individual may employ different methods. I have not been lucky enough to see the act myself, but I have the evidence of eye-witnesses in whom I can rely. St. John's original statement that the young are held in the feet, the legs hanging, is at times correct; Mr. C. B. Simpson saw the method from a hide only four yards away and sent me a sketch. St. John corrected (?) himself after later experience, and said they were held between the thighs, and others have added, kept in position by means of the depressed bill. Mr. Moffat saw the young thus held against the breast, but without any bill support, and Mr. Mackereth saw both bill and feet used."

It is almost unnecessary to state that the descriptions, in which Mr. Coward placed so much reliance, could be applied to woodcock when they *pretend* to carry a chick; or in other words, when they are trying by asim ple trick to lure a human being away from the neighbourhood of their young family. I have also seen *drawings* of woodcock in this position with a chick between their thighs; but I have not, nor as far as I am aware has anyone else, seen a photograph.

This mention of drawings reminds me that woodcock allegedly carry their young in another position, which is, I confess, new to me. On page 357 of the *Illustrated London News,* March 2 last, is a reproduced drawing by Neave Parker with the co-operation of Dr. Maurice Burton, which shows a woodcock in flight with a chick on her back. This is offered as scientific fact, but I shall be astonished indeed if any genuine ornithologist accepts it as such. We can at least understand how a chick *might* be gripped between the legs of a woodcock, but I certainly cannot believe that a chick could ride with any security on her mother's back.

Now let the late Mr. Dugald Macintyre have the last word. He said once that a Scottish headkeeper enclosed a woodcock's nest with wire-netting to see how the parent bird would deal with that obstacle when the chicks appeared. Alas! he miscalculated the hatching date, and found them dead. That hen evidently had not got the proper technique!

Plenty of pigeon coming well to decoys are required to justify this sort of fire power.

The Young Shot

Rust and Ringdoves

by Petrel

FURTHER to my rusty remarks of last week, another source of trouble which I had no room to mention and which, I think, applies particularly to wildfowlers, is the gun cover or canvas stocking. If these are used as they are intended, for temporary protection while travelling to and from the shooting ground, well and good, but sometimes guns which would be much better kept on view in rack or cupboard, where signs of rust are soon apparent, are cleaned and then put back in these covers and left for a week or more before being brought to light again. The owner forgets that the last time he took out the cover it was exposed to rain or damp salt air, and that the material may have absorbed enough wetness to do damage. Alternatively a rained on gun may have been encased in a hitherto dry cover which soaks up the moisture.

The obvious remedy is not to keep a gun in such a cover ; to wipe it dry before slipping on the stocking, and on returning from a wet day's shooting to dry out the cover in front of a fire or in the airing cupboard.

In very cold weather a gun may sweat when kept enclosed, and in dry zero conditions in America, hunters are recommended to leave their weapons out of doors and not bring them into the warmth of the old log cabin. A colleague of mine experienced this only last season when he found that put away in its case his gun showed signs of rust after a few days, whereas it remained spotless if left exposed to hard frosty weather in front of an open window. When this sweating occurs it may also have further-reaching, unseen effects, for the sweat or moisture can run into the action and cause rust amongst the working parts.

Thick oil in the action is to be avoided at the best of times and especially in arctic weather for it clogs and freezes. If we ever get another really cold winter and you can afford it, lubricate your gun locks with a drop of gin !

Making It Last

To sum up ; the surest way to avoid rusting and pitting, whatever cartridges are used, is to clean your gun superficially immediately after shooting has finished, and thoroughly in the recommended way as soon as possible after that. A day or two later inspect and clean it again. Keep the weapon in a place where the temperature remains constantly dry and where you can immediately notice any signs of deterioration. In this way a good new gun has a chance of lasting much longer than its owner and his children's children.

* * *

Anyone who makes a study of pigeon shooting knows the attraction which tall, bare trees especially dead ones, hold for the birds, and how they will always choose to settle in them for a good look round. But I have never seen it mentioned that pigeon will not only favour such a tree, but will also have a predilection for a certain branch, and I must admit that I had never noticed this fact until recently.

Favourite Spots

As is not unusual at this spring season, the pigeon were floating, apparently with no set purpose, all over the place on this sunny afternoon, and I ensconced myself behind a yew at the base of three lofty oaks. I shot from this position half-a-dozen pigeon, and each one was a sitter in the trees above. But what was most noticeable was the fact that every one of these birds alighted in exactly the same spot, to within an inch or two, although from the ground it looked as though any one of the many widespread boughs would have provided an equally suitable landing ground. Later I thought how significant it was that in every case the chosen bough provided the most cover from a gun hidden behind the yew, and three or four more birds which settled in the same spot flew away unscathed by the shot that failed to penetrate the cover of twigs.

Perhaps this pigeon telepathy business is developed to a higher degree than we realise.

It is when manoeuvring into position for a shot at a pigeon sitting in the tree-tops that one appreciates to the full the effectiveness of a face-mask. In fact it is possible when wearing such a mask to stare a ringdove straight in the face without scaring it, even if one's head is moving. On occasions, garbed in mask and gas cape I have walked within shot of birds sitting facing me and they took no notice until the gun was raised, but I will admit that those occasions usually took place in a wood where there was plenty of background with which to blend, and more often than not a fair wind to drown any noise of my slow and stealthy movements. In the open there is not much chance of a close approach. One of my shooting companions makes his own face veils from nylon stockings dyed a delicate shade of green, and most effective they are—in his case. He wears glasses, the frames of which keep a net of this sort off the face, but I find a mask of this sort too clinging and tight-fitting about the eyes.

Another, who fashions the most life-like decoys and paints them with the touch of an old master, uses cast off stockings to preserve his brushwork. Meticulously after a shoot he gathers his decoys and drops each one into a protective stocking cover which saves its paintwork from chips and scratches as it jostles with its fellows in the gamebag. One stocking will make about three of these decoy covers, but as my careful friend points out, nylon or silk is no good for this purpose. Lisle or woollen stockings afford much better protection.

Not many of us, I fancy, take as much trouble as he does to keep our decoys in good shape, being content to dump them in the bag with all the rest of the paraphernalia, but it is surely worth the time and trouble saved in touching up, and a clean, well-painted decoy must be more attractive than a chipped and bloodstained effigy. After all one does not often see a " scruffy " live pigeon amongst a feeding flock. On the contrary. Vermin he may be and a dull, ugly fellow when dead, but a live woodpigeon, with the sun picking out the white and mauve and bluey-green of his otherwise drab plumage, is a handsome bird indeed.

A Sorry Performance

A newly-sown field of corn last Saturday afforded the most likely chance for some time of a worthwhile shoot over decoys, but as so often seems to happen when the opportunity is right, I failed to make the most of it. Perhaps I did dally too long at the Elm Tree in whose shade hounds met for the last time this season, and maybe some of the birds were awkward as they approached out of the sun and dipped and swooped like yaffles over the decoys, but the sorry fact remains that my fourteenth cartridge was the first to account for a pigeon—although number five did bring down a careless crow.

What made it worse was that I was in a good position, having built a hide of fir and elder branches just outside a wood on the edge of the wheat field, and the pigeon, although not intent on feeding there with so much clover and other corn about, were passing and coming to look at the decoys in ones and twos for most of the afternoon ; thanks mainly to another gun behind the wood, who was keeping birds on the move.

I gave myself the benefit of the doubt by deciding that I was badly out of practice at these slower, oncoming low birds, and this was borne out in part when I found myself killing the faster, passing pigeon. All my shooting recently has been snap work at pigeon passing over or coming into woods, when there is no time to watch the bird coming from afar and poke at it.

Some of those birds looked enormous and so close and those that were missed and those that were brought down reminded me that beneath its thickly feathered overcoat a pigeon is quite a small bird which must be the reason for so many near misses and also accounts in large measure for the fact that the point-blank pigeon is seldom badly peppered although the feathers that it sheds give the impression that it has been blown inside out.

Otter Hunt on the Wye

by J. Ivester Lloyd

I HAD long promised myself that, one day, I would go and see Captain Ronnie Wallace hunt the otter on a Welsh river. It was one of those things I dreamed of as I sat before the fire on a winter's evening, perhaps to be done next summer—or the summer after. Then came the opportunity for carrying out my wish.

Our local pack, the Bucks Otterhounds, fixed up a joint week with the Hawkstone, Captain Wallace's hounds, to hunt the Rivers Usk and Wye. The thought of walking the banks of those two lovely rivers was enough in itself to make up my mind for me and, added to that, my photographer friend Ken Purkiss was going, which meant that transport and a pictorial record of the trip would be taken care of.

From now on, the trip became an expedition, and its base was the Crown Hotel, Hay-on-Wye, which is in Wales, although only just. Now, since the war it has become the custom to criticise British hotels, so it is only fair to praise one which deserves it. The Crown is surely the otterhunter's (and I imagine also the fisherman's) ideal. Always we came in late for the evening meal, as hungry as any proverbial hunter could ever be, demanding steaks with their sides not too close together and all that should go with them. They were produced too, and cheerfully. Wet clothes were dried and sandwiches provided each day to take out hunting.

The two packs hunted on alternate days, but it is about the day with the Hawkstone at Builth Wells that I want to tell you, for here I saw what I had come to see, Ronnie Wallace hunting his hounds on a Welsh river.

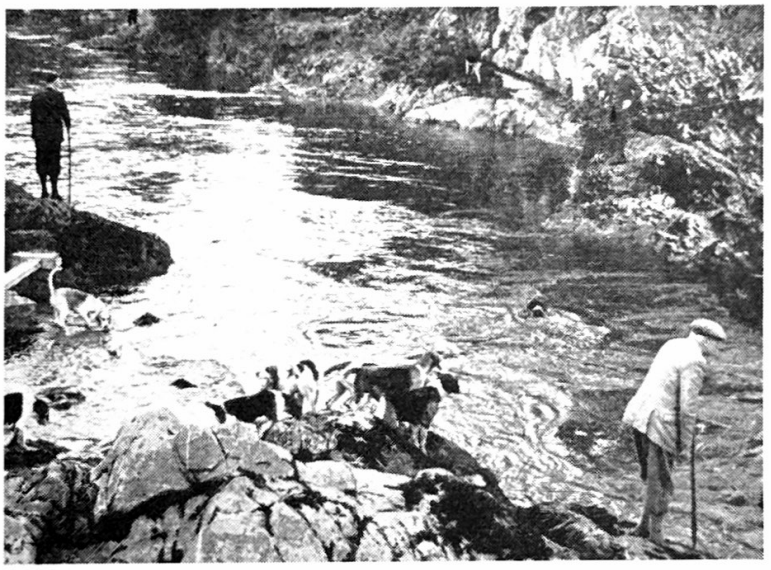
The day before had been disappointing from the hunting angle but entirely satisfactory from the scenic and social point of view. We had followed the Bucks pack for many miles up the exquisite valley of the Usk; we had watched dippers flitting from boulder to boulder and bobbing as if bowing to each other. A few of us had even seen a salmon in a deep pool below a fall. But the only view we had of an otter was a quick, brown form and whisking rudder going over the shallows. That was all, and what happened to it nobody can say. Later on, bathed and fed, we relaxed in the Crown bar. Charles Parker, who whips-in to the Hawkstone, was there with his three game terriers, two of them, Patch and Bon, curled up together on the most comfortable chair, Nettle, the third, sitting on the bar, helping herself now and again to our beer.

Ken and I had planned to start for home on Friday but, first of all, we would go to the meet at Builth. We might even stay for an hour, if there was "anything doing." So we set off in Ken's shooting brake, he, Charles, the three terriers and all our luggage, along a road which followed the course of the Wye in its upper reaches where it flows through wooded dells, between impressive hills, some of the grandest scenery I have ever seen.

A Colourful Scene

There was a great gathering at Builth, otterhunters from all over the country, the varied uniforms of Wye Valley, Eastern Counties, Pembroke and Carnarvon, Courtenay Tracy and, of course, plenty of the Hawkstone and the Bucks scarlet and blue.

A cold drizzle was falling when we moved off along the left bank of the Wye, cold enough to make some us turn up our coat collars and cold enough to make most of us hesitate when Ronnie Wallace led his hounds across the river, wading waist-deep, to try a tributary that came in on the opposite side. Do not ask me its name; I can neither spell nor pronounce it. They would be sure to come back we told ourselves, even when Miss Stella Uthwatt, Master of the Bucks Otterhounds, and a few others followed across the wide river. We leaned on our poles and waited until a burst of hound music made us regret our hesitation. Then a cheer from Ronnie and a rattle on his horn sent us into the water to discover that the stream was strong and swift and the river bed floored with smooth pebbles on which feet slithered and the real use of the otterhunter's pole was revealed.



Among the rocks at Builth ; a gigantic and lovely rock garden.

Hard On Their Heels

Scrambling up the steep bank, I could hear the merry cry of hounds drawing farther and farther away as they drove along the stony, tree shaded course of the stream. At a bend in the river I crossed a field, hoping to catch up with them, and there I met a native, who gave the enigmatical advice that it was "quicker to go round by the road—if you have the time, look you."

When, after running at beagling pace over a hill and through a thick wood, I eventually came up with hounds, their pace was slackening and the stream was little more than a trickle over the mossy stones. A few minutes later the drag which they had been hunting petered out and Ronnie led the way back to the main river. Here he drew upstream, through a place like a gigantic and lovely rock garden, where the water swirled around boulders, eddied amongst the clitters of rock and gushed over sudden falls.

There was an island above the big water fall and towards this, lifting their heads, hounds pointed, throwing their tongues, then plunged in and swam across. Here, no doubt, was the otter that had left the drag on the sidestream and probably returned overland through the woods. Put off from the island in a tumult of hound music, downstream it went to be viewed by sharp-eyed old "Doggie" Robinson as it slipped over the falls.

Here was the sort of hunting I had come to see, and as a hound was carried towards the waterfall I was concerned for its safety until I realised that this pack is accustomed to such conditions. When they find themselves being swept along by the current they do not struggle, but swim with it, heads held high and backs hollowed, in fact, unconsciously copying the shape of a surf boat. I saw several go over in this manner into the wild race of water below the falls and without getting their heads under water.

Among the Rocks

Now a scarlet cap was being held aloft by a follower standing on a boulder far downstream and, from his perch high up on a big rock, Ronnie cheered his hounds and called out to the viewer to "Holloa them on!" While some of the pack galloped along the river bank, others, helped by the current, swam to the spot, their voices echoing among the rocks.

There was a long check when hounds quested amongst the rocks, followers pried in crevices, and Charles with his terriers clambered about in the wild water of the falls to investigate those comparatively dry places which are to be found behind cascading water. One hound struggled against the stream until he reached the smooth foot of the rock on which the huntsman was standing and began clawing his way up its slippery slope towards a crevice that split the rock like some gigantic mouth. The hound bayed as he thrust his muzzle into the opening, and the otter came out over his head in a graceful dive. To make sure that the otter did not seek shelter in that place again, Miss Ann Howson of the B.O.H. crawled into the crevice herself.

We had expected the otter to keep moving downstream now when it would have had a fair chance of beating hounds but, instead, it headed upstream once more and, surfacing for a moment, brought a shout of "Yonder he goes!" from the huntsman. Fighting the fierce current, but with bodies not so well adapted as the otter's for this sort of work, hounds swam the wash.

Those rocks are riddled with hiding places for an enterprising otter, and often the cry of hounds rang above the tumult of the rushing water as they spoke to the the scent of an otter which was lying somewhere out of sight. If it could play this game for long enough, hounds would be the first to tire.

Once more a watcher on a rock viewed the otter heading downstream. On it went into a wide reach of the river where there is a thick reed bed near the right bank. Sounding a stirring rattle on his horn, Ronnie ran along the bank with those of his pack which were not already swimming. There was much splashing in the shallows and a swishing of reeds, and then that roaring note in hounds' voices which told of the end.

It was late in the afternoon when Ken and I set out for home. We had a long journey ahead of us, across the hills and Radnor Forest, with half of England to cross after that, but we were happy, for this was the end of a very successful expedition.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

GARGANEY

Sir,—I was particularly interested to read "Sea-Pie's" article on the above in your issue for March 15. In Northern Nigeria this year, we have had particularly large packs of garganey which start to arrive here in early November. In one location, near Nguru, there were many thousands on the shallow pools and I agree with "Sea-Pie" that to see them carrying out aerial acrobatics, particularly against the pale sky of a tropical dawn, is certainly a sight worth seeing. By the time they arrive here they are usually in full plumage.

It has also been a particularly good year for pintail, and a pack observed in early March must have numbered fully two thousand. Curiously enough, we seem to find pintail in one locality only which varies from year to year.

There have also been quite a few common teal about, and I had the pleasure of shooting a cock in full plumage in January. Normally, common teal are rare out here, and this is the only occasion on which I have shot one.

I hope these brief facts may be of interest to some of your readers who may visit this country.

B. GIDNEY,
Kano, Nigeria.

MEASURING LONG SHOTS

Sir,—In "Gun Gossip" (issue April 12) "North Country" suggests measuring the distances of long-killing shots. I have done this for the last three years, and these are my findings, albeit with a limited number of shots.

Using a side-by-side double 12-bore with 26in. barrels both half choke, firing 1 1/16oz. of No. 5 shot, the average range is 33 yards, based on 60 kills. These range from rabbits at 65 and 67 yards, pigeon at 50 and 55 yards, to a running mole at 5 yards.

Using a single .410 with a 23in. barrel bored full choke, firing 7/16oz. No. 6 shot, the average range is 22½ yards, based on 63 kills. The kills include rabbits at 40 and 45 yards, pigeon at 35 and 40 yards, and several others at 30 yards.

Using a bolt-action .22 rifle, with hollow nosed L.R. cartridges, mainly high velocity, the average range is 35¼ yards, based on 366 kills. These include a crow at 120 yards, a hare and and a rabbit at 145 yards, and a pigeon at 100 yards, the average being seriously reduced by some 200 shots at rooks at ranges of about 20 yards.

Seventy per cent of the shotgun kills, and all the rifle kills, were sitters (or swayers in the case of the rooks), so I hope the ranges mean something.

E. PIERCE,
Flintshire.

[While the measuring of long shots can be interesting, enlightening and useful, shots at rabbits and pigeon with the 12-bore you mention should not be taken much over 40 yards which is the maximum sporting range and should avoid wounding only. It may be possible to kill dead at greater ranges, but anything beyond sporting ranges should be strictly avoided.—Ed.]

VERMIN SHOOTING: LAST SEASON'S FOWLING

Sir,—I can understand Mr. Ward being refused permission only once in sixteen years, for I too belong to Westmorland. I was born and bred at Dufton, near Appleby. Then I had all the shooting I could manage and took a delight in keeping the vermin to the lowest possible number. I still wage war on vermin whenever I have permission to shoot. The number of carrion crows here has to be seen to be believed.

One reason why your wildfowlers are not keen on shooting "dopes," Mr. Ward, may be the present-day price of cartridges. On one affray here last year, I shot myself out of cartridges, which had cost me over four weeks' "pocket money." As a working man I could not afford many days like that!

On this coast last season was one of the worst wildfowling ones for years. Mallard were scarce, and the wigeon and geese, though plentiful, rubbed their backs on the sky as they flighted too and from the flats. The two mainland punts were never in the water, and I do not think that those on Holy Island fared too well.

STOCK DOVE,
Alnmouth.

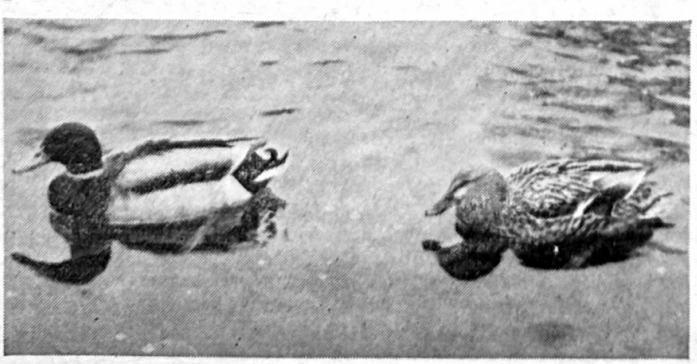
WHITE WILD DUCK

Sir,—Considering the number of occasions upon which mallard are known to consort with white duck, whether on farm yard, park, or river, it is rather suprising that full-winged offspring from their union are not seen more often. Because the birds are not barren. I have seen white and part-white ducklings quite often.

I enclose a photograph of one of these hybrids, taken last year on Lough Beg, in Northern Ireland, and obviously mated with the drake mallard in the photograph. As can be seen, the duck is quite lighter in colour than a wild duck, the feathers being white tipped with brown; the tail is predominantely white and there is a white patch at the base of the bill near the eye. The bird is altogether more striking in colour than its wild cousins.

This bird and others, including several white duck, were seen at flight regularly, and — I think — are descended from ordinary white farmyard duck left to their own devices on the Lough, which is bordered by numerous farms.

L. GOWAN,
Whickham, Newcastle-on-Tyne.



A hybrid duck and her pure mallard drake. (See letter "White Wild Duck.")

Mr. H. S. Norris of Woburn Park being presented with the Silver Pheasant Trophy by Sir John Ruggles-Brize after the Annual Gamekeepers' Clay Pigeon Tournament at Cambridge. On the left of the photograph is Mr. T. N. Gallyon and second from the right Major A. W. Neve, secretary of the Gamekeepers' Association. A full report of the meeting will appear in next week's issue.

THE PURPOSE OF STAG HUNTING

Sir,—Reading the columns of the daily Press, one gets a nasty feeling from much of what one reads that the sole object of staghunting is to satisfy the blood lust of a lot of callous but jolly countrymen inured to the barbaric cruelties they are practising on a harmless creature. This is rubbish.

In 1949 an independent and unbiased committee was appointed by the government to inquire into cruelty to wild animals. It is a pity that those who now have so much to say on the subject of staghunting, do not appear to have read the Report made by the committee on red deer in this country. It is well worth reading, but, of course, prejudicial to the case for abolishing staghunting. It is no use blinking the fact that red deer breed just like other animals. If their numbers become excessive, they leave the moorlands and break into farmland in search of food. They can do considerable damage to corn and root crops. It is, therefore, imperative from the farmers' point of view that their numbers should be limited to those that the moorlands can support in food. At this point it is worth quoting the conclusion reached by the committee on red deer hunting:

"In our view, therefore, the hunting of red deer is a useful and necessary form of control which affects both directly and indirectly the agricultural population of Exmoor. Inevitably some suffering is involved, but it is no greater than that involved in any other practicable method of control and does not justify legislative action to prohibit the sport. Hunting should therefore be allowed to continue as at present."

That seems plain enough; hunting is a necessary form of control and despite the statements of various persons calling into question our sanity for believing this, it seems to me extremely unwise to ignore the implied warning, that if we abolish hunting the numbers of red deer will get out of control. If that happened one does not need to be a seer of repute to foresee the probable sequel. I suggest this would be an urgent appeal from farmers for the extermination of red deer because of damage caused to crops. A couple of minutes thought must make this obvious.

Is extermination of the red deer in its wild state in Britain the real aim of these anti-sport people, or is it that they are so blinded by prejudice against staghunting that they cannot foresee or be bothered with the consequences of what they propose? They would do well to ponder what was said by the late King George VI: "The wild life of to-day is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after"—a quotation which appears on your leader page every week.

Let us control the red deer sensibly. Let us be clear in our minds concerning the stag where worthy sentiment ends and sloppy sentimentality begins. Above all, let us be sure we keep this grand member of our native fauna alive in his wild state for the enjoyment of our children. We are in grave danger of being humbugged into signing the death warrant for his extinction.

This current attack on staghunting is merely an incident in the campaign to abolish all field sports. As I have mentioned before in this journal there are many many nobler causes in the world to-day to support than that of depriving British sportsmen of their heritage of field sports. But unless we stand together, be we staghunters, foxhunters, shooting men, or fishermen and are eloquent in our own defence we shall go down like ninepins, one after the other.

R.F.W., Sussex.

New Books

Rough Shooting, by Gurney A. Grattan (Faber & Faber, 28s.). During the past three decades conditions in the shooting world have drastically changed, and it is high time that a book was written bringing the whole "modern shooting scene" up to date. And here, most certainly, is the book many of us have been waiting for. At the price of 28s. it is "dirt cheap" when we consider its 220 pages packed with hard, accurate facts and good writing, to say nothing of a profusion of first-class photographs and countless valuable diagrams. The latter show sections of guns, cartridges, proof marks, etc., etc., while the chapter on the law and shooting is, in itself, almost worth the price of the book.

Here is no loosely-written shooting book for rough shooters and others, but one well produced by the publishers and obviously written by an author who knows his subject almost from A to Z. And I write "almost" advisedly, for none of us knows all there is to be known about game, other birds, or even ballistics.

Mr. Grattan writes for the beginner as well as for those who have shooting experience. He writes on guns and cartridges; individual game birds; on gundogs and gundog training; on the arts and technique of rough shooting; the management of rough shoots; the monthly duties of the amateur keeper; on a host of other subjects intimately connected with rough shooting and not-so-rough shooting.

In short, this book covers every possible aspect of its subject, even including syndicate shoots. This is certainly one of the best and most accurate books of its kind we have read.

The Whippet Handbook, by W. Lewis Renwick, and **The Dalmatian Handbook,** by Clifford L. B. Hubbard (Nicholson and Watson, 7s. 6d. each). Here are two more little volumes of the publisher's Dog Lover's Library. The first deals with every up-to-date facet of the whippet world; at the same time, it is rich in historical allusions. In keeping with the other titles in this series, it is well illustrated with portraits of past and present examples of the breed.

The second book is similarly illustrated with famous Dalmatians. And here again we have a dog rich in historical tradition, and one which has grown more popular as a show dog, a guard, and as a working dog since before the war. Moreover, it has been twenty-five years since the first and only authoritative work on Dalmatians was published in Britain. Mr. Hubbard has done well in this volume to unearth many facts concerning the history of the breed.

Man-Eaters and Jungle Killers, by Kenneth Anderson (Allen & Unwin, 16s.). Those who read the author's "Nine Man-Eaters and One Rogue" will certainly enjoy equally this new one. Like the former, it is one of high adventure in the jungles of India, well written and exciting to the extreme.

Mr. Anderson has an extraordinary understanding of the minds of wild animals, and, though not a big game hunter in the more accepted sense, he has frequently been called in to handle situations where a locality has to be freed from the menace of a man-eater at large.

Step by step he takes the reader through each adventure, explaining fully his methods and precautions. Here is a book for all who are fascinated by true accounts of jungle life and adventure in remote places —told by one who knows the value of building up a story to an exciting climax.

The book is illustrated with many first-class photographs taken during the author's forays, one or two of which are unusually exciting action pictures.

Wildfowl of the British Isles, by Peter Scott and Hugh Boyd (Country Life, 21s.). We are continually being asked by wildfowling readers to name a book which deals only with geese and duck and by which these birds can be easily identified. Here is the book. It contains faithful descriptions and likenesses in true colours of all the swans, geese, and duck which have occurred in a wild state in the British Isles, together with three species (Canada goose, Egyptian goose, and Mandarin duck) that were originally introduced by man but which are now established in a wild state.

Peter Scott needs no intrduction, and his co-author is the biologist at the Wildfowl Trust. Between them, they summarise all the available information on identification, voice, range, distribution, nesting, and food of British wildfowl. There are chapters, too, on the reporting of ringed birds, and a short guide to wildfowl literature and a selected bibliography.

Peter Scott's unique record of paintings from life of all the species mentioned are, of course, an invaluable part of this book.

CLAY PIGEON SHOOTS

TO BE HELD DURING

MAY • 1957

Continued from page 318

BLANDFORD AND DISTRICT GUN CLUB

MAY 18th, 1957 at 10.30 a.m.

AT

HEDGE END • BLANDFORD • DORSET

THE SOUTHERN COUNTIES DOWN-THE-LINE CHAMPIONSHIP

(100 Birds)

Programmes from Hon. Secretary:

F. M. McFARLAND, North Barn, Bulbarrow, Nr. Blandford, Dorset

SUNDAY, MAY 19th, 1957 at 1.45 p.m.

NORTH OF ENGLAND D.T.L. CHAMPIONSHIP

To be shot over 100 Birds in 4 stages of 25 Birds

A & B Classes

£75 in cash together with I.C.I. Plaque and Medal

I.C.I. Cartridges to be used

Ammunition and Light Refreshments supplied on the ground

Details from A. H. Riddell, Hon. Secretary

HARROGATE GUN CLUB - PENNY POT LANE - HARROGATE

Telephone: Harrogate 6274

WORMSHILL & LYNSTED (KENT COUNTY) CLAY PIGEON CLUB

ANNUAL OPEN DOWN-THE-LINE SHOOT

100 BIRDS - 25-BIRD STAGES - CUPS & PRIZES

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 1957 at 10.30 a.m.

at KENT SHOOTING SCHOOL

(Opposite British Legion Workshops, Preston Hall, Maidstone—4 miles London side of Maidstone on A.20)

Further details from:

D. G. NIGHTINGALE, 94 Bell Road, Sittingbourne, Kent

OPEN SKEET CHAMPIONSHIP

AT

WALTHAM ABBEY GUN CLUB - HONEY LANE

(Near Isolation Hospital)

SATURDAY, MAY 25th, 1957

Commencing 1 p.m. (Entries accepted up to 3 p.m.)

OPEN and CLASS A, B and C - INTER-CLUB TEAM

2-MEN TEAM

Prizes value £30 or more - Entries £2.10.0 for 80 Birds

A SPORTING SHOOT WILL BE STAGED

Cartridges available on ground but competitors may use their own provided the maximum load is 1⅛oz., the largest shot size No. 6.

• LICENSED BAR, TEAS & SNACKS AVAILABLE •

Entries to:

A. J. Andrew, Hon. Sec., 45 Pebworth Road, Harrow, Middlesex

(BYRon 1966)

Weekend on the Elbe . . .

by Jeffery Harrison

LIFE in the Forces, particularly for a National Serviceman, I had been warned before I went in, is just what one cares to make, always provided a good sense of humour is kept well to the fore. As it happened, no one could have been luckier than I, when I was posted to Royal Naval Headquarters, Germany, at that time in Hamburg, but it was a very anxious Surgeon Lieutenant who enquired of his predecessor on Hamburg station what the place was like and what there was to do: "Well" was the reply, "it's not bad, provided you like duck shooting, which I don't." Somehow, it seemed a little hard to tell him that the heavy case he was so gallantly struggling along the platform with, contained my gun, waders, 200 cartridges and shooting clothes and looking back, I rather doubt if he had enjoyed his posting as much as I was to enjoy mine.

One of the great advantages of naval life in Hamburg was that we had boats on the Elbe and as keen a set of wildfowlers as I have ever met anywhere. Not infrequently we used to act as hosts and guides to other less fortunate shooting syndicates from the other two Forces or the Control Commission, who were without boats. These were a necessity for shooting some of the finest marshes on the Elbe and in particular the famous Pagensand "Reserve"—which consisted of two islands, Pagensand and Bishorst, and called a "reserve" because shooting was only allowed at the weekend.

The weekend I am about to describe was without doubt a classic. We were to provide the boats and four guide-guns for a syndicate of Hussars from Lüneburg and Lübeck. The guides were my Captain, John Wilkinson, now spending an interesting time among the wildfowl and penguins of Antarctica in command of H.M.S. "Protector"; John Holt, now on Christmas Island in the Pacific; "Pinkie" Collard of cocker spaniel fame and myself.

I had charge of one of the boats, an ex-German air-sea rescue launch and had five guns to care for, who were to shoot Pagensand. They included the Colonel. For those who do not know Pagensand, which included my Hussars, I should explain that the place we were to shoot consisted of a large area of reeds at the southern end of the island, in which were three exceedingly muddy bays, which were covered by each tide. The reeds themselves were from 6-12 feet high, and at certain strategic places in the centre (and best) bay we had placed wooden platforms on forty gallon drum "floats," from which to shoot.

Arrival of the Hussars

We had assembled at the landing stage outside Hamburg at lunchtime on Saturday. Hussars are among the elite of the Army and most excellent people. Ours were all most charming, but they had little idea of what kind of a weekend was in store for them, as most of them had never done any real wildfowling before, although they were all keen shots and of course, excellent horsemen. They arrived in the Mess bus, a splendid machine which they explained (as an opening gambit in the game of "One-upmanship") could be converted when necessary into a horse-box. Indeed, a wisp or two of straw on the floor indicated that recently it had been just that! They all wore beautiful check tweed caps, hacking jackets and either spotless breeches or whipcord trousers, and they must have thought that the extremely muddy breeches and oil-skins of their guides were not quite in keeping, but of course they were far too polite to say so.

We travelled fast down the Elbe at 25 knots, carefully explaining that we had to so slowly owing to the possible damage ashore (half a mile away) from the bow wave—which made us all square at "One-upmanship!" The tide had turned by the time we dropped anchor off Pagensand and the mud was fast uncovering. I pointed this out to my Hussars, who said they did not mind. I then went ashore first with the Colonel; fortunately the tide enabled us to get well into the bay by boat, thus avoiding the worst of the mud, but the Colonel stepped out of the skiff, took one step and fell over. His boots were too big. He stood up and they started to come off. Fortunately I had some rope, so we tied them on and then I left him standing there, while I took all our gear to the nearest platform, before everything was hopelessly muddy.

The poor man had overbalanced by the time I got there, but not to be outdone, he got up and staggered on, clutching furiously at each wader in turn! He was a very heavy man and he made a noble effort and finally we reached the stand, hidden in the reeds and all was well. Later, he proved how tough he was by taking off his waders and going round in bare legs to collect his duck. This was what they all did and once they got the idea of the mud, things went better, but even so, they could not understand how I could walk about in my waders and I overheard one saying to another that "the Doc" must be a very powerful man (one up to us!).

Influx of Migrants

The duck were about in greater numbers than ever. It was September 9 and the migrant fowl were pouring in. Great packs of teal, hundreds strong, whirled over us during the short wait for zero-hour, Pagensand being the teal island and we put their numbers at 3,000. The cloud of mallard departing from Bishorst was an awe-inspiring sight—5,000 at least—but they already knew how to take care of themselves and great Vs of them shifted across the river to the southern marshes, some pintail with them.

My opening shots were a double miss at teal and it proved an omen for the afternoon. With the doubtful excuse of standing in soft mud (our Hussars being on the stands), I never settled down to shoot well, although the teal gave wonderful sport. Afterwards some of the Hussars who had served in Egypt, agreed that it was even more exciting than the best they had had there, which surprised us and made them all square again! The Colonel shot well, but always as if from a grouse butt, standing bolt upright, gun at the ready. Consequently his teal were always rocketting upwards and looked most spectacular. The Major also shot well, but the other three had four duck between them for the entire weekend, though they said they had thoroughly enjoyed themselves—and really meant it.

Evening Flight

About an hour before evening flight I decided to set off to see what birds were to be found on the southern bay and after struggling through a great reed-bed which towered above my head, I discovered a pack of about 300 teal were resting on the mud. It seemed possible to do a stalk as a shallow depression probably gave just enough dead ground to get me behind a reed clump at the edge of the bay. I set off. The first 100 yards were simple if energetic, crawling on all fours over soft sand and grass. A thin belt of thistles was carefully negotiated and then 10 yards of bog, where I was fearful of splashing and putting the duck away. When finally I reached the rushes, I found 30 more yards of grass and the duck too far to the right, so it was back again through the bog, which did not matter as I was now soaked, and out again on a new approach.

This time I got within 50 yards of the duck before getting stuck, as I could not cross a ridge two feet high and there was nothing for it but to have a crack at them from this cover and I was very pleased to get six teal.

The shot put up many waders—a fine selection that included a flock of little stints, a dunlin, several siberian ringed plover, curlew, ruffs, a wood sandpiper and a greenshank.

Evening flight was more marked than it had been so far that season, the duck beginning to settle down to a more regular routine. Teal came over us all continuously from early dusk, flying very fast and long before it was dark many of us had run out of cartridges. Getting back to the boat after dark was better than I had feared, as all the Hussars, now plastered in mud, were carrying their boots. We had a nice few duck to carry, but if we had

(Continued on page 332, col. 3)

Marsh harrier disturbing teal from the centre bay of Pagensand.

Offhand shots are tempting, but should not be attempted by a novice.

Realistic Rifle Shooting

Some illusions about the power of the sporting .22 rifle are dispelled

by L. R. James

AFTER thirty years of sporting rifle shooting at home and in the East, I am still astonished at the credulity of the man in the street about the accuracy of the rifle, and even the experienced shotgun user is sometimes inclined to be optimistic over the powers of a .22. At my gunsmith's recently, a young man was buying ammunition, and I overheard him telling the assistant that he regularly shot woodpigeon on the wing with his .22 rifle ! A year or so back, I invited a friend (who carried a rifle for 4 years in the late War), for some rabbiting with a .22 rifle on my shoot. He said that he hoped I would excuse his lack of skill as he was not too confident of being about to hit a *running* rabbit at more than 200 yards !

Let us look at the theoretical accuracy of a first-class rifle, and consider the problem of shooting *and* killing a rabbit at 100 yards. It is generally recognised that two 2-inch circles represent the lethal areas on a rabbit where a hit means a certain kill. The makers of a high quality range rifle (weighing from 9 to 17lb) do not guarantee anything better than a 1 minute group at 100 yards from a *bench rest*. This means that the finest .22 rifle is only capable of putting shots into a halfpenny at 100 yards —given no wind, perfect ammunition, and quite ignoring the human factor.

The average sporting rifle weighs from 4½ to 7lb., and it is a very good one indeed that will make 2 minute groups at 100 yards from a bench. Apart from the inherent limitations of the rifle itself, there are three other factors to be considered when shooting at small game; the wind, the range, and the skill of the user. It is rare to find a day without some wind, and a light puff is enough to deflect the bullet an inch at 100 yards—especially with the High Velocity cartridge—and so to miss the head or heart of a rabbit.

Range Estimation

Now let us consider range. It is simple enough to estimate distance with reasonable accuracy up to 40 yards, but at short ranges an error of 5 yards or so does not matter since the bullet will strike above or below the point of aim by only a fraction of an inch. It is a very different matter at 100 yards; estimation is much more difficult, and a 10 per cent error is enough to miss the lethal two-inch circle and perhaps the whole rabbit as well. How many of us are skilled enough to say whether a small target is 80, 100 or 120 yards away, especially on strange ground? Some of my own " long shots " on a big open field have failed because I was shooting at a baby rabbit much nearer than I estimated! Longer distances made .22 shooting a pure matter of chance, and I simply do not believe the man who regularly kills rabbits at 120 yards—measured with a tape measure! I have won many a small bet by challenging a good indoor shot to say how many cartridges he would need to register a hit anywhere on a two gallon bucket at 180 yards. It is not easy to hit a mark the size of a cow at 300 yards: try it and see!

The Human Factor

Now we come to the human factor. A good average 25-yard range marksman reckons to make ½ inch groups, or perhaps a little better if he is really in form. He shoots on a windless range, uses accurate ammunition in a good light, and the distance is correct to an inch or so. His heavy range rifle is as accurate as he can make it, and he is in the prone position and using a sling. How can the sporting rifleman compete with these perfect conditions, and expect to achieve a similar standard of accuracy on a rabbit ?

In my experience, the average sporting .22 weighs about 5lbs, and never had much accuracy, in the range sense, when it was newly acquired. The barrels are often fouled, or " shot out " or both. I am often called upon to group such weapons, and I seldom find one that will do much better than a 2-inch group at 25 yards; *i.e. an 8 minute group.* I admit that the owners get used to them, and manage to kill some rabbits now and again, but the successful hits are better remembered than the many misses ! There are also many discarded range rifles in sporting use, and on the whole they are a much better proposition than lightweights as regards accuracy, but heavy to carry very far.

I suggest that the longest range at which any rifle and its user can put three consecutive shots into a matchbox is the *maximum* working range of the weapon, and that it is unsporting to shoot rabbits at longer distances. I am not enthusiastic about range shooting as an end in itself (perhaps because I spent three wartime years instructing beginners) but I do recommend every sporting rifleman to take his weapon to a range and spend an hour with the target shots. He may become a sadder and a wiser man.

'Scope Sense

If a visit to a rifle range shatters a few illusions, the answer is not necessarily a telescopic sight ? Good 'scopes are expensive, and it is a complete waste of money to fit one to a poor rifle. A scope is not a short cut to good shooting, it is merely an optical device to align the rifle on the target in a foolproof manner, and it does *not* make the rifles shoot any straighter. If rabbit shooting is confined to shots at 50 yards or under, a 'scope is not necessary for those with good eyesight. As the target image is so big and clear, it has the tendency of encouraging those long shots that seldom come off without wounding and losing many unfortunate rabbits. A power of 3X is ample. Bigger magnifications decrease the field of view and exaggerate the holder's wobble. My own sight is below average—especially in bad light—and I find the chief virtue of a telescopic sight is to enable me to spot a rabbit that would otherwise be invisible to me.

While I admit that shooting would soon become savourless if every shot fired scored a certain kill, we should at least, attempt to achieve this standard by cutting out carelessness. I can see little point in using a fine rifle and perhaps an expensive 'scope in a slapdash fashion, and so discounting the advantage of owning a good tool. I always use a sling, and I never disdain to take advantage, where possible, of a rest such as a tree or a gate, for I am certain that it pays dividends in clean kills.

Summer stalking of rabbits may involve " offhand " or standing shots, and such are permissible to a skilled performer, but I think that beginners should acquire some skill on inanimate targets, and not learn to shoot at the expense of wounded rabbits. It is not difficult to hit a sitting rabbit *somewhere* at short distances firing offhand, but the prime object is to kill—not to wound. Rook shooting in May provides excellent practice for summer rabbiting, but even in the rookery, I like to use another tree as a rest where possible.

Shotgun shooting is an art, but rifle shooting is a science that calls for a much more deliberate and cold-blooded technique. It is point of honour in big game shooting always to follow up and despatch a wounded animal. The habit of the rabbit of disappearing into the nearest hole makes this practice impossible, but, we should, for the sake of sport, shoot only when a kill is reasonably certain and so honour the spirit of the law.

There can be a great deal of sport involved in getting really near to the rabbit by skilled stalking and woodcraft. After all, deerstalking is 95 per cent approach and only 5 per cent shooting, and rabbit stalking can be made just as exciting and almost as difficult !

Bodger Brightens the Club

by Geoffrey Moore

BILL BODGER is one of those effervescent types, who are full of new ideas and possess a steam-roller like determination to carry them through. It was almost inevitable that he should have been unanimously elected to the secretaryship, when it became vacant. At every meeting, he had been so full of ideas. His next move was to scrap all save the butt lighting and instal fluorescent instead. "Must attract the customers," he said to one old member who dared to grumble.

By this time most of the convivial members of the town were desirous of joining.

However, there was a gathering storm. The alternatives for any proposals made, that there was a general feeling of "let's see how he does it himself."

Bodger believes that nothing in life is so dull that it cannot be brightened up. To him the club, its premises and its members were the very essence of drabness. He was out to make our evenings cheery and gay. What effect such a policy might have on the shooting was, of course, a matter entirely for the shooting captain.

It was perhaps unfortunate that his plans should have had initial financial backing from the legacy of £100 left to us in the will of Tom Jenkins. Bodger quickly overcame the suggestion of investing this sum at 4½ per cent to provide a nest-egg for a rainy day.

"Now is the time," he told us, "to lay the foundations for real prosperity. If we were to spend the money on laying down a parquet floor between the firing point and the butts, we could have a dance every now and then. That would make 4½ per cent look like a widow's mite."

"And lose a night's shooting?" asked the captain in horror.

"It will happen so rarely," said Bodger, reassuringly, "that you will hardly notice it."

I must admit that the first evening was quite a success. The band played on a temporary platform beyond the butts, the lights of which gave the impression of footlights. Our beloved firing point was buried and camouflaged beneath a great bank of borrowed pot plants.

Nearly every member was there, though many were nursing a secret, morbid hope that they were about to witness a flop. However, with the members had come the members' wives or sweethearts and the wives' friends and their husbands. One way and another the range was accommodating more people than it had ever done before. The new parquet floor was voted a great success by the ladies, which meant that the men had grumblingly to agree. Above all the dance showed a profit of £15 7s. 6d.

No one was really surprised, therefore, when Bodger suggested, perhaps I should say insisted, on another dance the following month. Some people came because they enjoyed the first one, while others were there to secure "ammunition" with which to argue against subsequent functions. Naturally, Bodger made another profit.

Licensed Premises

Logically, the next step, from Bodger's point of view was to apply for a licence. This he did himself, and I don't suppose that the magistrates were able to get in much of a word besides "granted."

At first this was to be a monthly licence only, until Bodger pointed out that we were missing a great deal of potential profit. So back he went to the magistrates and from then on we were open during normal licensing hours.

Bodger thought it a pity that we were not really a drinking lot, but was able to correct this, as he explained at our next meeting. He had received applications from a dozen or so of his cronies who would like to join. "All good drinking types," he assured us.

As the profits mounted so did Bill's expansive more serious amongst the shooting members were wearing grim and ominous expressions. There was even talk of starting a rival club—for shooting.

There were scenes, too. Such as when a lady visitor stepped back and dug her high heel into the captain's calf as he lay on the firing point. More than once the main lights were put on in the middle of a shoot to enable some flibbertigibbet to powder her nose, or for some such other triviality.

Bodger was getting above himself by now. No one seemed able to question his authority and the committee were pure cyphers in his hand. He had decided that monthly dances were insufficient to satisfy the local craving for this form of amusement. He announced that there would be a mid-month dance and overrode the captain by pointing out that there was no match fixed for that night.

He had reckoned, however, without one small, independent group who had fixed that night for a friendly match. They came in before the dance was due to begin, and I saw them standing in a little knot viewing the arrangements with repugnance. They soon went; to drown their sorrows in the local, I supposed.

Couples began to gather in evening dress. The band arrived and took their instruments out of the cases on the platform beyond the butts. Shortly afterwards they struck up the first waltz and several couples took the floor.

Rival Factions

At this moment I noticed that the original group had returned, still in their shooting clothes and with determined expressions on their faces. They went about the business of preparing themselves for an evening's shooting as though no one else was present. The pot plants were quickly swept from the firing point, and dancers were jostled aside as two of the party went up to the butts to fix the targets.

The music died to an astonished stop. The ensuing silence was broken by "Tiny" Malone, who announced in a crisp voice.

"Will everyone please come behind the firing point as shooting will begin in one minute."

At once there was bedlam. Bodger, supported by several new members, advanced on the would-be firers and, I thought, was ready to exchange blows with them. Elsewhere people stood about with indecision on their faces, while their tongues clacked. "Tiny" Malone and his party, meanwhile, resumed their preparations on the firing point.

Tension was at its height, when our president, grand old boy that he is, came on the scene.

"Silence," he called, once and once only, for his voice had a ring of authority such as I have not known him to use before.

"There will be no dancing tonight—or firing," he added in the direction of "Tiny." "I declare the premises to be closed for the night. I shall appreciate it if all ladies and gentlemen will leave as quickly as possible."

"Tiny" was the first to make a move. Silently he rose and gathered up his kit to return it to his locker, the other would-be shooters following his example.

The president, who had disappeared into the secretary's office, emerged again holding a single sheet of paper in his hand. A crowd quickly gathered round him, at a respectful distance, as he pinned it to the notice board. I was just able to read, over Rocky's shoulder, the words written in the president's own hand.

"There will be an Extraordinary General Meeting of Club at 7.0 p.m. tomorrow."

There was a good attendance the following evening. Indeed the only absentees appeared to be Bill Bodger and some of the new members.

They elected me the new secretary, I really wished they had not, but they gave me a simple brief.

I was to restore the *status quo*.

The unanimously adopted motion read as follows: "That this club shall be reserved exclusively for small-bore shooting."

What an excellent job "Tiny" and his friends did the following Sunday afternoon. You would never have thought from the speed they worked that the bar parquet flooring had taken so many days to instal. And "To sale of Parquet—£5" made a nice enough entry in our balance sheet for that year.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

April 26 & 27: C.P.S.A.'s 25th Annual British Open Sporting Championship and 2nd Annual English Open Double-Rise Championship, Northolt, Middx.

April 27: Leigh and District G.C., Windy Bank Farm, Glazebury, Manchester.

April 28: Birmingham G.C., Brockhill Lane, Redditch. 10.15 a.m.

May 1: Wetherby & District G.C., Yorks. Practice Shoot.

May 2: Gamekeepers' Annual Shoot, Taverham, Norwich (organised by C. S. Rosson & Co.).

* * * *

Reports and Results

The weather for the **Bisley Gun Club** April shoot was in direct contrast to that on the occasion of the March shoot, there being a very strong head wind blowing throughout the whole day. This naturally had an effect on the scores, and only five of the 28 competitors managed to be "up on handicap" in the main event. After a couple of tie shoots these were sorted out with the result that Mr. A. E. Halsey (who joined the club at the shoot) was 1st, with W. H. Gardiner 2nd, and H. T. D. Brunt 3rd. In the High Gun Class, W. R. Skewes had an excellent 98 points, and was hotly pursued by R. E. Dutton with 96, and G. E. Woodford 95. This event was followed with a 25 bird sweep, in which five competitors, Messrs. Brunt, Halsey, Gardiner, W. E. Harris and Horlock, all managed possibles with the aid of their handicaps, and these divided the spoils.

Mrs. Northover was present and handed out the prizes to the winners, and also presented the two aggregate prizes which had been competed for during last year. The Major Northover Silver Bird was won by B. H. Caesar, and the new trophy, a silver Rose Bowl presented to the club by Mrs. Wilkins in memory of her husband, the late Mr. M. L. Wilkins, was won jointly by G. E. Woodford, and J. A. Baigent, each of whom will hold it for six months. Mrs. Northover was accorded the usual cheers and "whisper" by the members.

The Annual General Meeting followed, and the president, Mr. A. E. Browning, presided over a fair number of members. After the minutes of the last meeting had been read and signed, the secretary gave his annual report. He said that the average attendance at the eight shoots the club had held was down to 24, against 32 two years ago. He mentioned that the prizes had been well distributed, only one member having won two first prizes, and these were in the High Gun class. In the handicap class all the first prizes had gone to different members, which he thought was a very good thing, and said something in favour of the handicapping system. The secretary went on to refer to the loss the club had suffered in the sudden death of the armourer, Mr. W. A.

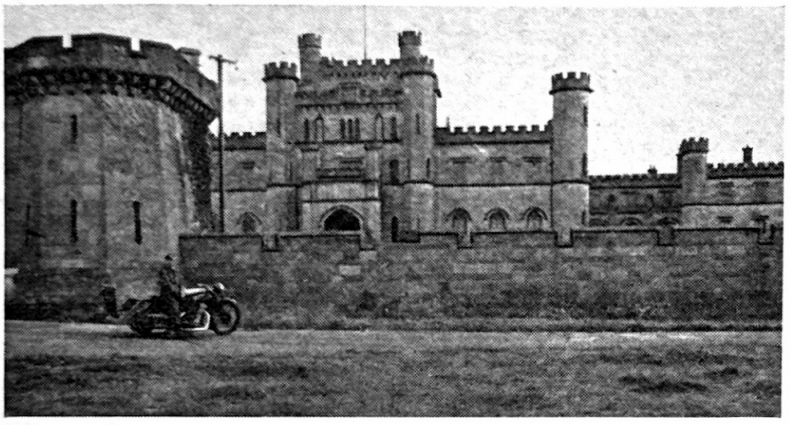
(Continued on page 335, col. 3)

There Lived a Man

by R. D. Humber

THE news that Lowther Castle, near Penrith, is to be dismantled, revives many memories of this once princely house in a park seven miles long, and in particular of the colourful squire of pre-war years, Hugh Cecil the fifth Earl of Lonsdale, universally known by the friendly bye-name of "Lordy" in Cumbrian sporting circles. Lord Lonsdale's source of wealth came from the Whitehaven, Cumberland, coal and iron workings, and he certainly spent it to make a showplace of the vast pink sandstone "mock" castle of Lowther and its fabulous gardens; and incidentally brought prosperity to the shopkeepers of Penrith.

The castle was built around 1800 upon an earlier foundation. Thirty-two gardeners were employed looking after the hundred acres of pleasure gardens in the castle grounds, seven kitchen gardens, and a third of an acre under glass. One greenhouse was solely devoted to growing gardenias for the sporting earl's favourite buttonhole flower. Seventeen gamekeepers were employed when Lowther was in its heyday up to the hungry '30s, when the purse strings were gradually tightened and the decline set in after Lord Lonsdale left Lowther in 1936 to live for the rest of his days at his hunting box at Oakham, Rutland.



Lowther Castle—seat of the late Lord Lonsdale.

And now the final dissolution of the vast pink castle that entertained Royalty, including the Kaiser just after the turn of the century, when the German emperor presented Lordy with a Mercedes car and a chauffeur to go with it, is about to be embarked upon, its stones, lead and timber to be pulled apart. But Lordy, and the legends grown up round him, will always be remembered in Cumberland and Westmorland.

Love of a Good Sportsman

The tall figure with the beaming smile under tufted eyebrows above the big nose, the long cigar and the white gardenia in his buttonhole, the yellow horse carriages, succeeded by the canary-hued Daimler and Mercedes, was a great feature of Grasmere sports and many another Lakeland show, be it sheep-dog trials, hound trail, foxhound show, or Cumberland-Westmorland's own style of wrestling. His popularity with the tough, plain living Lakeland sportsmen who follow hounds on foot and normally scorn the trappings of wealth, owed much to Lordy's unaffected speech, his downright love of a good sportsman, his generosity and blustery temper which never turned to meanness.

In August, after shooting on the grouse moors, it was customary for Lordy to take his guests to the duck decoy ponds after 3 p.m. in Lowther Park, where between seventy and eighty mallard were usually accounted for when dusk stopped shooting. Pheasant and partridge shooting was conducted on a lavish scale, and the lunches provided at an outlying farm, where the butler and his minions had prepared a banquet for the guests, was reason enough for the missing of many a pheasant that soared over the high timbered rides of Lowther in the afternoon. In January, 1892 7,430 pheasants were shot in four days in the park beats.

Lordy used to boast that he had held his own in the boxing ring with several famous professional pugilists, including Bob Fitzsimmons, champion of the world. He was useful with his fists and loved a scrap; no doubt the tigers of the ring allowed him his bit of fun, and let him keep his pride, but he had to swallow it upon one memorable occasion when he fell foul of an under-keeper on the Lowther Estate. The lord and the keeper took their jackets off and had a furious scrap, which resulted in a good hiding for the master. Later that day the keeper gave in his notice, but Lordy would not hear of him leaving his service and gave him a fiver, growling with a bruised smile: "I'll get the better of you next time."

He loved to boast of his sporting feats, and was not above varnishing a story, but I believe it is authentic that he once, for a wager, walked a hundred miles in twenty-four hours, finishing up at the Ram Jam Inn on the Great North Road, and afterwards walking several more miles to stay the night at a relative's country house! This was achieved, of course, when he was an athletic young man.

Gundogs at Dinner

A friend of mine, soon after the first world war, went up to Lowther during the start of his apprenticeship as a land agent. On the first evening, Jack, feeling rather over-awed by the magnificence of the castle, sat down to dine with Lord and Lady Lonsdale in the huge dining room fitted with recesses or alcoves around the walls. Just after soup had been served, Lordy suddenly cracked his finger and thumb like a pistol shot, and about a score of gundogs, labradors, retrievers and spaniels rushed out of their hidden couches and grouped themselves round the Earl. Unfortunately, a lively retriever hit the bell-pull rope near its master's shoulder, and the bell-pull hit the plate of soup, which was emptied upon his lordship's lap. He roared for the manservant and shouted, "How many times have I told you to move this rope further away?" The servant inclined his head and replied quietly: "Yes, my lord, but how many times have you told me to move it back again?" Lordy swallowed his ire and said not another word; he got up and went out to change his trousers, and shortly came back, restored to great good humour, the event quite forgotten.

The next morning, Jack, wishing to make a good impression, rose early, as he had heard stories of Lord Lonsdale walking about a dozen miles before breakfast. Jack was the first of the household to enter the breakfast room, where many tempting steel-covered dishes were on the sideboard, kept warm by spirit flames, for him to help himself. He enquired of the manservant whether Lord Lonsdale was out in the grounds. "His lordship is still in bed," he was informed. Half-an-hour later Jack heard Lordy's loud commanding voice outside in the garden, calling to his dogs.

Annual Coursing Meeting

He entered the breakfast room by a french window and greeted Jack with great affability. "Good morning, young feller, have you just got up? Its too beautiful a morning to lie in bed; I've just enjoyed a splendid walk to Helton and back (about ten miles). Jack half turned and looked in dismay at the manservant. He perceived a slight movement of the impassive flunkey's visage, an eye-lid flickered and closed!

Lordy used to hold an annual coursing meeting for greyhounds and lurchers and invite all the north-country sportsmen to the castle who bore the name of Lowther, and the Romany tribes as well. It was said that all of this name, however humble, came from the stock, and some of the potters and dealers who arrived for this unique sporting festival of their clan would have startled the Royal enclosure at Ascot. The gypsies, in return, would never poach on his extensive preserves.

It was this characteristic of Lordy which endeared him to north-country folk; he was a good mixer and loved a fellow sportsman. As the late Lord Queensberry said at the conclusion of his moving tribute to Lord Lonsdale over the wireless in 1944—"There lived a man."

WILDFOWLING CLUBS

(Continued from page 322)

Game Bag," "Birds of the Prairie Marshes," "Point" and "Hunting Dogs"—was given on March 20, and was a great success due mainly to the great efforts of Messrs. Ansbro, Haithwaite and Smith. It was most pleasing that both the Club's vice-presidents Brig. C. D. Marley and Mr. John Cowen were able to be present. A telegram of good wishes was received from our president, Sir Fergus Graham, who was precluded from attending due to his duties at the House of Commons. Some excellent paintings of game and wildfowl have been provided for the Club by Mr. J. Walton whose skill has been admired by everyone who has seen his work on the Hunter Training lectures.

It is very pleasing to note, and our treasurer Mr. John Abel is to be congratulated on this point, that Club funds are in a very healthy state, and largely due to this, is the Club committee able to go ahead with plans to obtain some respectable shooting rights.

The Duck Rearing Committee is now preparing to get more birds in the air and it is hoped to release quite a few mallard later in the year. A rifle section committee has been formed and have already arranged target shoots to take place during the summer months. The usual clay pigeon shooting will also be a feature of entertainments available to members. Plans are also in hand for the Club annual general meeting which will be held in June.

The W.A.G.B.I. annual general meeting was attended by Messrs. Standen, Thompson and Hill, and the various points there raised were placed before the Club at the last meeting. There was some amusement caused when it was announced that our chairman had won a fireside chair at Hoylake, and his description of the Darlington contingent's ride home was very lucid. Our chairman wishes to add to these notes that he hopes members will continue to support the Club's fortnightly meetings, as no one, in view of the rising anti-sport propaganda, can afford to be complacent.

Fisherman's Diary

by Coridon

EARLIER this month a first edition of Walton's "The Compleat Angler" was sold at Sotheby's for £520, a reasonable enough reflection, I imagine, of the market demand for average copies.

It is quite certain that "The Compleat Angler" never become a publishers' remainder, for five editions were published in the author's lifetime. It is to be presumed that some angling works in early times failed to sell and were reduced in price or put up to lottery.

In these days a certain stigma attaches to the term publishers' remainders, but in a good many cases there is nothing wrong with books that reach that melancholy state except that the public of the moment is not in a buying mood. In earlier times there was a more interesting and happy-go-lucky attitude towards the unfortunate products of the publishing world.

An article by Basil Stenning in the current issue of *The Journal of the National Book League* throws interesting light on the disposal of unsold books in the 17th. and 18th. centuries. Often they were disposed of by lottery, the prizes being copies of the book. "The rest of the paraphernalia," writes Mr. Stenning, "was identical with all other lotteries—lottery offices, tickets, handbills, lottery wheel and officially supervised drawings."

He mentions several actual examples, two of which touch upon the interests of readers of *The Shooting Times*. Many are familiar with Blome's "Recreations of a Country gentleman," (1686). Today one has to pay from £10 to £20 a copy, according to condition, yet it was put up to lottery because it could not in its day sell for a few shillings. Of perhaps less direct interest was a publishing venture, which, to my mind, seemed doomed to failure from the start. It was Robert Thornton's "Temple of Flora," a beautifully produced series consisting mainly of coloured plates, published between 1799 and 1807. In our times, between the wars, this would probably have sold well in fortnightly parts, but in those days (and in these), few people were prepared to pay the then very high price of £80 for it. Mr. Stenning says that today a copy will fetch anything up to £300.

I have often wondered how much John Gould made from his ornithological works. Between 1832 and 1880 he dealt with birds of many countries in more than forty folio volumes containing more than 3,000 coloured plates. He must have made a reasonable income or he would not have continued, but he certainly did not know what his books would fetch in the 1950s. They are not common, but they are by no means rarities, and the present fashion for coloured book plates is such that whenever a Gould set (usually two to five volumes) comes to auction it almost automatically commands £100 to £300.

I wonder, too, what was the domestic division of profits in the Gould family. John Gould wrote the text and was the ornithologist, but the text is not of outstanding merit, and the plates, which bring in the 20th century money, were for the main part painted by Mrs. Gould.

Irresponsibility

Every angler has to face the fact that the cost of his fishing is likely to go up. Many advances in rentals have already been made, and rates follow in their wake. Like many other aspects of modern economics—or uneconomics—rentals and rates chase each other. If the rates go up the rental is increased to meet them. When the rental goes up a new assessment of rates is likely to follow. All this, unfortunately, we have come to regard, resignedly or otherwise, as part of the 1957 British Way of Life. Events concerning the River Witham, however, overstepped in the last few weeks the whimsical bounds of other areas.

The fishing rights on a section of the River Witham and the Fossdyke Canal are owned by the British Transport Commission. For several years they have been leased to the Witham Joint Anglers' Association for £1 a year, a sum which everyone realised was a purely nominal one which served only to maintain the legal situation. Suddenly the British Transport Commission told the Association that when the lease expires on December 31, the rental will be raised to £880 (or £800—the figure is variously reported) a year.

This sum being far too much for the anglers, a deputation approached the Commission to seek more satisfactory terms. Almost at once, it is reported, they were cut to £200 a year for a seven-year lease.

I have no idea what a fair figure for the fishing rights of the waters concerned may be, nor does it matter in a consideration of the policy or lack of policy displayed by the Commission. I do not know what department decided upon the higher figure, but any organisation that makes a certain demand and reduces it almost at once by 75 per cent must risk a charge of irresponsibility. It is obviously a good thing for Witham anglers that in this case such a reduction was made, but it would be interesting to know how, in the first place, the figure of some £800 was arrived at.

Australian Reservoirs

In many parts of Australia an adequate water supply is the only key needed to turn useless ground into fertile pasture or arable land, while most of the towns are, as elsewhere in the world, now largely dependent on reservoirs for household and industrial water supplies.

In warm climates with a low humidity the loss of water from reservoirs through evaporations is a serious one, and I read that experiments have been made at St. Stephen's Creek reservoir, New South Wales, to reduce evaporation by creating an artificial surface film. This film is formed of a solution of cetyl alcohol, a substance extracted from whale oil.

It was estimated that evaporation from the experimental reservoir (which covers 900-odd acres) was reduced by 37 per cent, which meant in effect the saving of about one foot depth of water over the whole surface, a saving whose value is far in excess of the cost of the treatment. It is probable that many other Australian reservoirs will be similarly treated, and it is expected that other countries will take up the idea.

No mention has been made (in anything I have read so far on the subject) of the effect of the film on fish life or on the life of countless arthropods that depend on reaching the surface of the water at some stage in their existence.

The cetyl alcohol may not harm them either of itself of by its film properties, but if it should prevent the metamorphosis of aquatic flies—to cite only one example—then it is as well for British reservoir fishing prospects that our reservoirs do not lose enough by evaporation to make preventive treatment worth while.

Solitary Dipper

For at least four years a dipper has lived on and about my local trout stream, and every year I think from its actions that it must have a nest beneath the long bridge that carries the road diagonally across the stream.

No young ones have ever been in evidence so presumably my dipper is going through the motions of fledgling feeding without the fledglings. A contributory argument is that I have never seen two dippers together. This is not conclusive, for I must confess that I cannot tell a male dipper from a female—but I cannot imagine that a pair would never spend a few minutes together on the river.

The bird is easily observed by anyone who, like an angler, is accustomed to moving slowly—or at least to avoiding sudden and jerky movements. It restricts its movements to a very short stretch of water upstream from the bridge, and if it decides to move after being observed on its favourite perch—a low-hanging broken bough—it flies only to its second favourite, a rock in midstream some fifty yards away, reversing the process if disturbed from the rock.

Bass at the Banquet

Nothing could point more clearly the difference in outlook between French and British chefs than the fish course served at the State banquet for the Queen during her recent visit to France. This consisted of *Bar du Golfe Amiral*, and *le bar* is that sporting fish so keenly sought by British anglers, the bass.

The French do wonderful culinary things with saltwater and freshwater fish—including, for example, weevers—that are largely neglected in England. The bass, of course, is an excellently flavoured fish as southern sea anglers and their families know well, but commercial fishing for it is neglible and it is not generally available to the public. The point is that anyone planning a British State banquet for, say, President Coty, would be unlikely even to think of bass.

Weekend on the Elbe

(Continued from page 328)

shot better it would have been many more. I know that I missed nearly twenty in succession in one terrible patch.

Dawn came late, bringing light rain with it. We rowed the Colonel down to the southern bay, where I had stalked the teal, the rest of us struggling back to the centre bay. It was a disappointing flight; most of the duck had moved to quieter parts of the estuary. I had 11 teal and a mallard and enjoyed listening to the astonishing early morning squeaks and squawks of a family of spotted crakes and watching a pair of marsh harriers gliding over the reeds in search of a meal.

We stopped shooting at 0730 and returned on board our launch to sail across to Bishorst to meet the other party. The flighting on Bishorst the evening before had been wonderful, mallard pouring in. "Pinkie" had also seen the first two greylags of the season and a wigeon.

We had had a fine shoot and our bag was 217, which included 67 mallard, 141 teal, 1 shoveler, 1 wigeon, 4 garganey, 1 shelduck and 2 snipe, for our party of some 16 guns.

On the way home we passed great rafts of fowl resting on the shore almost all the way back to Hamburg, fifteen miles up river; we also saw a young little gull and 100 black terns, but so far as I was concerned, I was keener to make up for lost sleep than to indulge in any further bird-watching. The Hussars, however, completely won the weekend's match of "One-upmanship" with their final gambit on arrival at the jetty in Hamburg by announcing that they had to rush off in the Mess horse box—I mean bus—as they had a most important polo match that afternoon!

Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

A READER from Leamington writes about his eight months' old springer spaniel. This dog, he tells me, is of O'Vara strain, and training has been started on the shoot whereon rabbits have made a good comeback. The trouble is that though the puppy hunts hedgerows well, for its age, it will pick up a shot pigeon or hare, look at its handler, walk a few feet and then drop the retrieve. "I have tried everything to get him to retrieve to me," writes my correspondent, "even with a dummy of rabbit fur, but with no success. Perhaps it might be too young yet, and any advice you can give will be much appreciated."

This reader tells me that he regularly reads my page in *The Shooting Times*, yet here we have a man falling into the cardinal error of "putting the cart before the horse." He wisely obtains a puppy of impeccable working strain, and in his eagerness to get going starts training at the wrong end! Note that he has "even tried a dummy of rabbits fur," but all this after taking the dog out shooting and trying it on pigeon and hares. My only hope is that he has not got the puppy so keen on hunting rabbits that his efforts to get it retrieving properly will be too late.

When will some people realise that you do *not* train a puppy by taking it out shooting at an early age? I have stressed again and again that the preliminary hand-training course is most essential, yet a regular reader ignores this and gets himself into trouble straight away. If ever I needed an excuse for my frequent repetition of the simpler training details this is it. Year after year readers write for help along these lines, and hope that I can get them out of difficulties which, had they read my articles properly, would never have been encountered.

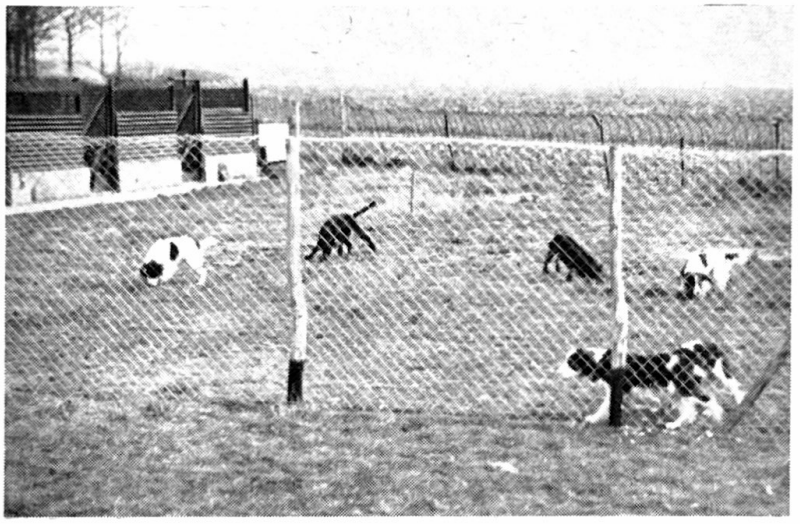
I dealt with early training of a spaniel fairly thoroughly in a recent article, where the question of hunting or obedience first was discussed, and also the age at which to start a puppy. It would take a large book to go deeply into the subject, and my advice to any reader who wishes to train a gundog is to obtain a good book even before purchasing a puppy, so that he can start off on the right foot. But the elementary principles have been discussed so many times in these pages that I am amazed that a regular reader should make the errors that my correspondent has fallen into.

The Cardinal Rule

Whilst the questing ability of a spaniel should be established as early as possible, the cardinal rule is to make sure of its retrieving of a dummy before taking it out shooting, even if you do not satisfy yourself as regards its obedience and steadiness, which is almost equally important. To take out a puppy of from six to eight months and shoot hares and rabbits to it without any preliminary training is fatal, and asking for just the trouble which my reader relates.

What is he to do now? I have no first-hand knowledge of the puppy, but I do know the strain pretty well, and can safely say that the puppy has "got what it takes," is probably sensitive, willing to please, and has a natural retrieving ability. The danger is that it has by this time come to consider questing its number one—indeed its only—duty, and will therefore not take kindly to retrieving the dummy or anything else.

As I see it, there is only one plan of action. Take the puppy off all practical shooting work, and get down to some serious obedience and dummy work. Everything possible must be done to encourage the puppy to lift and carry, and to this end anything soft can be used—a slipper, a rubber ball, an old glove even. It might be better practised indoors during the evenings and must certainly be carried out well away from all excitements and scent of game or rabbits.



Grass exercise frames, if periodically rested, are more healthy than brick or concrete.

Then, and Then Only . . .

The owner may have to show the puppy what is required by gently placing in its mouth the dummy, and encouraging it to hold it and later to walk about carrying it. Success having been achieved, the object can be thrown a few feet, and if all goes well the practice can be extended along normal lines. Most puppies of eight months are only just about beginning elementary field work, and are certainly not being called upon to lift pigeon and hares just shot to them.

Once the idea of retrieving to hand has been implanted—and here I suggest that the reader concerned obtains a book or books on dog training generally—obedience and steadiness to thrown dummy can be commenced, and this carried on to the point where the handler is satisfied that he has full control of his dog and that it is happy about retrieving. Then, and only then, should he introduce *cold* game or pigeon and, having obtained satisfaction with the performance on these, graduate back into the shooting field and with warm stuff. I further suggest that until the owner is completely satisfied with his dog's retrieving he keeps it as a retriever and restrains it from questing, walking it with him on the lead if need be. I can safely say that instead of gaining time by his action in getting the dog into the field early, he has lost it, and it may take weeks, possibly months, before the puppy begins to behave as it would have done at nine or ten months of age had he started training in the correct order and at the proper time.

My second query this week comes from a reader who has a four years old springer which is a good hunter and goes out to retrieve fast enough, but comes back very slowly and instead of delivery to hand walks proudly round its handler before giving up the game. This dog has been acquired from an owner who had it professionally trained, and much of the trouble may be due to strangeness or even the difference in handling technique between the old and the new handler. My correspondent adds that since he had the dog he has been pigeon shooting every day, and wonders if this is sickening the dog and thus creating the troubles to which he refers.

Some dogs always act as described—eagerness to go out and reluctance to come in, plus a display of pride by walking round the handler. This is usually due to bad training in the first place, or to some accident such as another dog running in and snatching the game away from it, probably in the impressionable early stages of field work. Of course it is possible that daily pigeon shooting has something to do with the lack of keenness in retrieveing generally, but a dog of four years of age should not be easily sickened of shooting, although many never regard pigeon with great favour as retrieves.

Walking round the handler may have been caused by punishment given for running in after the dog had returned with its retrieve, and this can also cause a slow return. Punishment for hard mouth can create the same fault, and so can useless retrieving of too many birds lying in the open. Indeed, in a case like this, it is well nigh impossible to discover the cause. The cause being unknown, the cure is not so easy to suggest. However, my usual recommendation that the dog should be rested from real work applies, and various experiments can be conducted in an effort to speed up the return of the dog with its retrieve, bearing in mind that it is never so easy to improve a dog once it is over two years of age and, consequently, set in its ways.

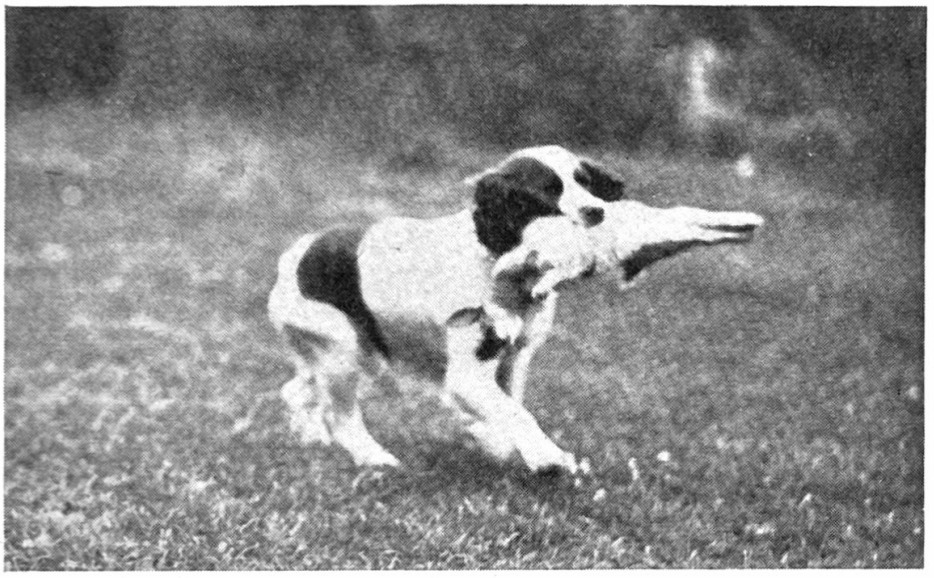
The "going back" retrieveing practice, so often recommended in these pages, should be tried. A dead bird, or a dummy if the dog will still retrieve it, is dropped in full sight of the pupil, who is then walked on an appreciable distance before being sent back for it. The handler should walk—or even run—on, whistling or calling the dog, and he should take the object from it whilst both are "on the move." He can and should use long retrieves, never short ones, for this practice, and it is also a good idea to hide from the dog from time to time in order to make it eager to find its handler.

No dog likes feeling lost, and usually shows great pleasure when it discovers its handler, and should then be made a great fuss of and praised. Care should be taken not to sicken the dog of any of this practice, and it should only be given a few retrieves of any kind each day. Indeed,

it may pay to keep the dog off everything bar routine exercise for a week or more before commencing the work.

Once some improvement as regards the pace of the return has been effected, steps can be taken to improve delivery, although this may already have become better due to the "going back" work and taking the retrieve whilst master and dog are on the move. With a dog which will sit and hold its retrieve firmly, a very good plan is to make it sit a few feet in front of you as it returns. The handler then steps forward, pats and praises the dog (making it remain on the drop meanwhile), and gently removes the retrieve.

As progress is made the dog can be dropped closer and closer to hand, until in the end it is sitting at its handler's feet holding the dummy. Never snatch the dummy away, and, if you like, even give the dog something to carry when on walks, and now and again remove it gently, praise the dog, and give it back again. In this way great confidence between dog and handler can be built up, and you will often find that a dog so treated will come and put its paws on you and hold its retrieve up to be taken away. If you reach this stage you have most certainly won the battle.



Cold, stiff retrieves should be given before freshly shot game.

I referred earlier to indoor practice with a gundog. It is surprising the valuable amount of work of one kink and another that can be given indoors to a puppy or grown dog which is accustomed to being in the house, or even to one which can be got accustomed to it. In that wonderful book "Dog Breaking" by General Hutchinson, he gives much advice about indoor training, and even used to practice his pointer pups on seeking for pieces of toast cunningly concealed about the room. I once gave a springer pup (one of my earliest dogs) a lot of useful training in the bedroom whilst I was recovering from an attack of 'flu, and this paid off handsomely. The great thing, as with all training, is in knowing where to stop, and the avoidance of sickening the pupil by too much repetitive work. Little and often is a good maxim, whether with a puppy or a grown dog.

Love of Elevation

As I write, I can see two springers and a labrador happily perched in the spring sunshine on top of the large sleeping box in the outside run. Dogs love to be elevated, whether it is that they can see better that way, or prefer to be off the ground itself I would not know. But the provision of raised boxes or benches—even if raised only a few inches, is advisable in kennels and runs, especially those in which the dogs are likely to be kept for long periods each day. They make for contentment and silence which, if you have neighbours, is golden.

On the other hand, if you desire your dogs to get as much exercise as possible when out in the runs, the boxes should be removed. There are arguments for and against grass runs—which in any case soon become just earth runs if used much—and though concrete or brick runs are easier to keep clean and much drier, they do not give the dogs as much fun nor, I suspect, are they so healthy, as the grass run. Of course earth will harbour germs and is difficult to disinfect thoroughly, but if used judiciously, and for short periods, and rested from time to time, the grass or earth exercise run is probably preferable. I write here of *exercise* runs, and not of the kennel runs in which the dogs are likely to be kept most of the time.

Earth runs have their dangers, for if the fencing is not properly dug or concreted in the dogs will dig their way out, and this is not the only danger. Puppies will often swallow stones or other solid matter which they find or dig up, and this can lead to trouble if not quickly discovered and steps taken to clear the obstruction.

MUSIC

by Anthony Carroll

HER father was a Field Trial Champion: her mother as smart a labrador bitch as one could find. Music herself would catch the eye in any litter; and it was to catch the eyes of judges that she was bought as a puppy. For her first owners thought only in terms of the show bench. So in due course Music faced crowds that jabbered and eyes that peered at Olympia and liked them not. Crowds were an anathema to her: so that in the ring though a good looker she never showed to advantage. A yellow ticket was the best she could achieve and her owners lost interest in her. A failure in the ring, she was deemed useless and sold to the highest bidder.

Her next owner was a retired grocer. He had bought himself a villa on the outskirts of the town and thought to have a dog to guard it. Besides, he was fond of dogs, though he had never owned one before, and Music appealed to him. He liked going for walks and man and dog could often be seen strolling down the paths of the Town Park to the pond, where he would throw sticks for her into the water and she would swim in and fetch them out. He was lonely too and the gentle, kindly labrador was company. Indeed, they had a special bond: for both were ruled by and frightened of "the missus," he secretly, Music openly. For "the missus" was severe and houseproud and disapproved of shed hairs and muddy paws.

"I won't have that dog inside the house," she would say and Music would be driven out by voice and broom and chained in the backyard, where she conceived a hatred of women in general and of aproned women in particular, a hatred which lasted her for the rest of her life, with few exceptions.

The Fancier

Alas! an epidemic swept over the land. The kindly little man took ill and soon afterwards laid his hand on Music's head and fondled her velvet ears for the last time. Music lay for three days chained, unattended, lonely and uncomprehending until a tough looking fellow, who described himself as a "fancier," came with a rope and a collar and took her away.

Her new home was a small paddock behind a bungalow. Here, dogs of all sorts, from great danes to dachshunds, lived a noisy, riotous and temporary existence, coming and going as trade fluctuated. She was mated soon after her arrival in the establishment and in due course presented her new owner with a litter of puppies which brought him in good money. From his point of view her purchase had been justified: but the existence of a "fancier" is a precarious one and, times turning bad, he passed Music on to a keeper in part payment of a debt.

Now it happened that the keeper, Mr. D., a great name in the gundog world, was a friend of mine. Often would I visit him and we would talk dogs. Thus it was that I happened to call on him shortly after Music's arrival in his kennel.

"What's that bitch you have there?" I asked, seeing Music for the first time. He told me her breeding and her history and called her over to him. She came, I remember, with her lips and eyes wrinkled up into a vast smile. Indeed, this smile was a very part of her, an outward sign of an inward friendliness.

"I'd like to feel you had her," he said. "She'd make a first rate brood bitch."

"Will she work?" I asked.

"No. I'm afraid not," he replied. "You see she's never been trained."

"Well!" said I, "As you know I have two pups training at the moment. I couldn't have an untrained dog about the place, setting the pups a bad example. Sorry! I'm afraid she's of no use to me."

"A pity," he replied, "but of course you are right. She's four now, rising five. You couldn't train her now, especially with her background." Meanwhile Music sat in front of us, wondering what was going to happen next and smiling all the while. My friends words kept on echoing in my head . . . "You couldn't train her now, especially with her background." It was a challenge and, I felt, a duty.

"I'll take her," I said.

When I got home I was given a curtain lecture by my wife. What foolishness had I been up to now? Did I not know that we had more dogs than we could do with already? Had old Mr. D. put some soft tale across me? But my wife has a way with dogs. As she spoke she knelt down and Music, albeit apprehensive, crawled up to her and licked her hand. Then came Music's wonderful smile.

"You're rather an old darling," said my wife and I knew that all was well with them both.

I started training Music right away, just as if she had been a puppy, and she responded remarkably. It was as if all her life she had been waiting for just this one thing—to become a worker. She was so eager to please and always tried so hard to do the right thing. If at times she failed it was because she did not understand the order, never because she would not try. So good indeed was she that at the end of the summer I entered her for the obedience test at our local show. By that time she would walk at heel with or without a lead, sit at command and stay down whilst I went out of sight, drop to shot, hand or whistle; fetch a dummy at command from land or water, marked or unmarked, and retrieve well over a flight of hurdles. In fact she could do all the stock obedience tests well and with a grand style.

On the day in question we started off well. Music was steady to shot and walked beautifully to heel. The next test was to sit at command and remain sitting whilst I walked away. The test was dead easy: I had done it with her a hundred times at home. But I had not reckoned with her old fear of women. At the ringside, close to where she sat, three girls chattered, laughed and pointed. It was too much for Music: she took one look at the girls, broke her sit and raced to the protection of my heels! So much for our one attempt to show off in public.

But when the shooting season started Music came into her own. I gave her a "cold" bird to start with and then took her out driving partridges. At the first drive she had an easy bird or two. At the second, I had a runner down. She had marked it well and at the end of the drive was quickly at the spot. But when she found it was alive (it was a Frenchman) she would not pick it up! She put a paw on it, backed away when it fluttered, licked its face, and generally behaved like a puppy! But a keeper's dog came up and threatened to take it off her. That was just too much. She picked the runner up smartly and raced back to me, grinning all over her face. "I've learnt that one," she seemed to say.

Two Hares Together

At the last drive that day, I remember, I shot a hare. Later in the drive my next door neighbour shot another which galloped on some hundred yards before rolling over in the plough. At the end of the drive I called out to him that I would get his hare for him and sent Music. On her way out she hesitated opposite my hare, galloped on and picked up his, raced back to where my hare lay and bless me if she did not bring in both together.

I had put in some time with the puppies that winter and it was not until January that Music had her first cock pheasant. Thank heavens I was shooting the hedgerows with an old friend, for Music took some time to realise that a pheasant is mostly tail and must be seized firmly amidships! It was a runner in a bramble bush that taught her. It was a strong runner and Music, scenting it from the outside was through those brambles like a raging lion. And when she came out with the old cock properly held and looking over her shoulder, she was smiling her broadest.

A day or two later she was teaching me a thing or two. We had driven out a railway embankment and I had a cock down in some long grass forty yards out. A dead bird I would have sworn to: but Music, when sent, feathered at the fall and took a line back into the embankment. I left her alone and shortly afterwards noted a cock sneaking away from the embankment a hundred yards away. I nearly called her and cast her on to this bird, but at that moment she came to me at a gallop with a cock in her mouth. The bird I had just seen had never been fired at! And what an idiot I should have been to have called her off a runner on to an unwounded pheasant!

I never ran her in trials, though I felt she might have been as good as her illustrious father. But I was determined never to subject her to the ordeal of crowds again. Instead I passed her on to a keen shooting man and one who would I knew give her a perfect one-dog-man home. It was some years later that I met him again and asked after Music. "The best I ever owned," was his reply.

I felt that I had successfully answered the challenge that she could not be trained and had done the right thing by her. After all her early vicissitudes she ended by living the life and doing the job which was her birthright.

GUN GOSSIP

by North Country

I ALWAYS prefer to shoot young rooks with a rifle. I have shot them with various rifles including .22 singles, automatics, .297/.250, .310 etc. This is the sporting way and incidentally it is a way which causes far less disturbance at the rookery—always a consideration seeing that so many rookeries are close to the farm manor, or even the centre of the village itself. Of course great care about background needs to be exercised as bullets may travel three-quarters of a mile. Yet I would say that the majority of rooks are shot with guns—and not just because of the low-price cartridges. For most farmers have guns, and comparatively few possess rifles.

Rooks have to be thinned out and I dare say that, viewed solely from this angle the problem is best solved with a gun, particularly as some birds need to be taken on the wing. It can indeed be said that full justice in this sense can scarcely be expected at a rookery unless some shotguns are employed. Whatever the timing of rook shoots some fliers are almost certain to be encountered. And while a friend (an *exceptionally* good shot) used to be able to pick off *some* fliers with a rifle, he was only able to do so when all the circumstances were favourable (such as steady and straight flight, moderate range and clear uninterrupted view of the target). So a gun or two is needed to make a good job of it.

Now the point I am coming to is that a lot of bad shooting at these rooks may be seen. What should be a dead easy shot on the wing is missed—quite a lot too. Rooks are not pheasants, and nobody is concerned as some keeper or host might be. Yet this flying shot should be killed, if the art of shooting is to be pursued.

For we are sure to meet this slow straight flight at times in other birds. Some people can never seem to connect with a slow bird that comes into view a long way ahead. They wait, stiff and tense, and when the time comes they miss. This is something we all do at times—the difference being that some of us do it more often than others. Yet like other shots it is largely a matter of the proper kind of practice. You have to get in step with your bird and attune yourself to its mode of flight. That is what you have to do. But I realise only too well that it is easier to write this than to do it—if you are normally used to the shooting of fast-flying driven game birds and the like.

At these odd slow-flying birds—and indeed at vermin birds generally—the best performers I know or have seen are keepers. This is to be expected I suppose. As I say, it is a matter of practice. And many an ordinary shooting man literally never gets a chance to shoot birds other than the orthodox conventional game birds. However, should he take on some amateur keepering, he would soon learn how to shoot such birds. As it is, the trouble is that he either gives excessive swing to his gun and misses in front or he "pokes" at the bird, stops his swing and shoots behind. In either event, the bird flies on.

I have never been able to shoot satisfactorily when closing the left eye. If I close the left eye I nearly always look along the barrels and aim as one would with a rifle. This is quite ineffective, for it means that you fire at a fixed spot and do not swing your gun with and in front of the bird. A farmer friend, however, who is (or was) a very good rabbit shot, assures me that he invariably shuts his left eye. I have not seen him at rooks, but I should say he is the kind of person who would kill flying rooks with the utmost regularity.

There is no question but that a fair amount of good shooting *is* accomplished by the "one-eye brigade." Yet I firmly believe that some of those fellows who declare they shut an eye, in practice keep both eyes open (as I have always done). Otherwise how do they manage to snap-shoot with such effect? For eye-closing must slow things a bit—if only a trifle. Surely many of us do not know what exactly we do when shooting. This is all very well so long as we hit. It is not so well when we miss. Then it is we want to know what is amiss and where the remedy lies. It is not so easy to place a finger on the spot.

CLAY PIGEON SHOOTING

(Continued from page 330)

Greenfield, who had served the club faithfully and well for very many years. Mr. Martin then referred to two pieces of very practical help given by Mr. J. F. Mallabar in helping out with the Income Tax problems, and to Mr. J. C. Gow for his advice regarding the new lease which is about to be arranged with the N.R.A. He also thanked the trappers and scorer for their regular attendance, and for the standard of the service they all rendered, and to Mr. Frank Dance for his regular "chore" as honorary referee. Finally the secretary thanked all who had helped him at the various shoots, and ended with a tribute to the ladies who so charmingly present the prizes at all the shoots. The financial statement revealed the fact that the club had not had a good monetary year, and it was decided to arrange a couple of extra shoots, probably over the 15 trap trench, during the year. This matter, as well as several others, were all left for discussion by the committee. All the retiring officials were re-elected to office, with the exception of Mr. H. W. Tidd who asked not to be considered for the committee. Mr. Browning consented to continue in office as president, and was warmly thanked for his interest in the welfare of the club, as was Mr. Martin the secretary-treasurer. Mr. J. F. Thornton had again kindly audited the accounts, and the secretary was asked to write to offer sincere thanks to him for this labour of love.

A vote was taken about the date of the annual Wappenschaw, and it was agreed to hold this on the first Sunday in December and not on the Sunday nearest to Christmas. Then followed the hardy annual, "handicaps" and this brought with it a very long discussion, a good deal of which was about the possibility of handicap by distance, but it was finally decided not to embark on this method for the main events, although it was agreed to give it a trial run in a 25 bird sweepstake when the next one was arranged. The existing system was fully discussed, and it was finally decided that with one new revision, this should be the method used for the coming year.

The meeting ended with a hearty vote of thanks to the president for taking the chair.

The secretary announced that the programme for the year would be settled at a Committee meeting to be held at the May shoot, but it had already been agreed that the Surrey Area Championship would be decided at that shoot, which would be held on May 5, at 10.30 a.m.

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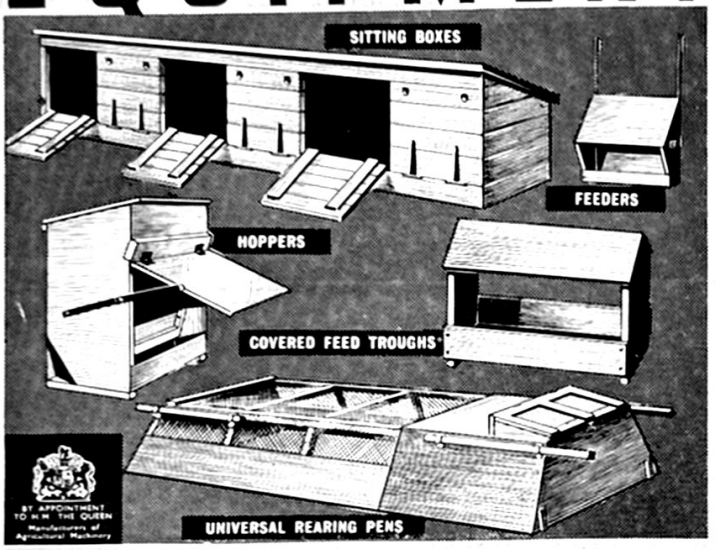

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